

T H E
H I S T O R Y
O F
O R A C L E S.
I N T W O
D I S S E R T A T I O N S.

Wherein are proved,

- I. That the ORACLES were not given out by *Dæmons*; but were invented and supported by the Craft of the *Pagan* Priests.
- II. That the ORACLES did not cease at the coming of JESUS CHRIST; but subsisted four hundred Years after it, till the entire Abolition of *Paganism*.

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Translated from the best Edition of the Original
French.

G L A S G O W:

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III.
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c
IV.
A
V.
A
VI
VI
VI
IX
X.

THE
C O N T E N T S.

The First Dissertation.

That Oracles were not delivered by Daemons, page 4.

CHAP.

- I. *THE first reason why the primitive christians believed that Oracles were delivered by Daemons. The surprising stories that were published concerning Oracles, and the Genii,* 5
- II. *The second reason why the primitive christians believed that Oracles were supernatural; and the agreement of this opinion with the system of christianity,* 9
- III. *The third reason of the primitive christians, viz. The agreement of their opinion with the Philosophy of Plato,* 10
- IV. *That the surprising stories told of Oracles ought to be suspected,* 13
- V. *That the common opinion concerning Oracles does not agree so well as is imagined with the christian religion,* 24
- VI. *That Daemons are not sufficiently established by Platonism,* 29
- VII. *That the great sects of the Pagan Philosophers did not believe there was any thing supernatural in Oracles,* 34
- VIII. *That other men besides Philosophers have had little esteem for Oracles,* 42
- IX. *That the ancient Christians themselves did not very firmly believe that Oracles were delivered by Daemons,* 49
- X. *Of Oracles corrupted or bribed,* 54

THE CONTENTS.

XI. <i>Of the establishment of new Oracles,</i>	59
XII. <i>What places Oracles were established at,</i>	64
XIII. <i>Of the distinction of days, and other mysteries of Oracles,</i>	70
XIV. <i>Of Oracles that were delivered in answer to sealed letters,</i>	75
XV. <i>Of Oracles delivered in dreams,</i>	79
XVI. <i>The ambiguity of the Oracles,</i>	85
XVII. <i>The cheats of the Oracles fully exposed,</i>	88
XVIII. <i>Of the Lots,</i>	90

The Second Dissertation.

That the Oracles did not cease at the coming of Jesus Christ, 96

I. <i>THE weakness of the arguments in support of the opinion, that the Oracles ceased at the coming of Jesus Christ,</i>	97
II. <i>Why the ancient authors contradicted one another often, as to the time of the cessation of Oracles,</i>	104
III. <i>The history of the duration of the Oracle of Delphos, and some other Oracles,</i>	106
IV. <i>That the Oracles in general ceased with Paganism,</i>	115
V. <i>That if Heathenism had not been abolished, yet Oracles would have ceased. The first particular reason of their decay,</i>	130
VI. <i>The second particular cause of the decay of the Oracles,</i>	138
VII. <i>The last particular causes of the decay of the Oracles,</i>	141

59
64
es of
70
seal-
75
79
85
88
90
THE

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

TO HIS

R E A D E R S.

NOT long since, there fell into my hands a Latin treatise concerning the Heathen Oracles, lately written by M. *Van-Dale*, M. D. and printed in Holland; in which I found that author has strenuously confuted the common opinion, 'that the ancient Oracles were delivered by Dæmons, and that they ceased intirely at the coming of *Jesus Christ*.' The whole work appeared to me to be full of deep knowlege in antiquity, and extensive learning; and I once had a thought of translating it, that the ladies, and those gentlemen who do not care to read Latin, might also be led into the perusal of a tract so agreeable and useful. But I reflected, that a translation of this book would not answer the end I proposed. Dr. *Van-Dale* wrote only for the learned, and was in the right to neglect those ornaments, which they would not have esteemed. He

iv THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

gives a great number of passages, which he quotes very faithfully, and his versions are wonderful exact, when he translates from the Greek: he enters also into a discussion of many points of criticism, which, though they are not always necessary, yet are always curious. This was his only way to satisfy the learned, who would not have thanked him much for reflections either moral or jocose.

Besides, Dr. *Van-Dale* makes no scruple very often to break off the thread of his discourse for the sake of introducing other things, which present themselves; and incloses one parenthesis in another, and perhaps a third: and herein he does not amiss, since they, for whom he proposed to write, are used to the fatigue of reading, and a learned perplexity does not embarrass them. But they, for whom I should have made my translation, would not have liked it, if I had taken this method: the ladies, and, to be plain, most of the gentlemen, of this country, are as much affected with the graces and turns of expression and thought, as with the solid beauty of the most exact researches, and profoundest discussions; and, being very indolent, they prefer books written in a regular method, that they may be the less

THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE. v

obliged to attention. For this reason, I laid aside the thoughts of translating, and judged it would be better, preserving the basis and substance of the work, to give it quite another form. I confess, that no man could extend this liberty farther than I have done; for I have changed the whole disposition of the book; I have retrenched whatever appeared to me either of too little importance in itself, or not entertaining enough to make amends for that defect. I have not only added all the ornaments I could think of, but many things, which prove or clear up the matter in question. I argue sometimes upon the same facts, and the same passages, which Dr. *Van-Dale* furnished me withal, in a different manner from him; and I have not been scrupulous to insert many arguments wholly my own. In fine, I have new-cast the whole work, and have put it into the same order as I would have done at first, to have answered my particular view, had I the ability of Dr. *Van-Dale*; but since, I come far short of it, I have borrowed his learning, and ventured to make use of my own judgment, such as it is; though I should infallibly have pursued his method, had I the same persons to deal with as he had. If this comes

vi THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

to his knowlege, I beseech him to pardon the liberty I have taken, since it will serve to shew the excellence of his book: for certainly his part in it will still appear perfectly good, though it has passed through my hands.

I have lately learned two things, which have relation to this book: the first from the * *Nouvelles* etc. or, News from the Republic of Letters, which is, that M. *Mabius*, senior professor of divinity at *Leipsic*, has undertaken to confute Dr. *Van-Dale*. He allows indeed that Oracles did not cease at the coming of *Jesus Christ*, which will be indisputable when we shall have examined that question; but he will by no means yield, that the Dæmons were not the authors of the Oracles. Now, his allowing the continuance of the Oracles beyond the time of the coming of *Christ*, is a very considerable attack of the common hypothesis, and it is a great argument that they were not delivered by Dæmons, if the Son of God did not silence them. It is certain, that according to the connection commonly supposed between these two things, what destroys the one, gives a very great shock to the other, or rather quite ruins it: and this,

* For the month of June, 1686.

THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE. vii

perhaps, after the reading of this book, will appear still more rational.

But what is more remarkable is, that it appears by the extract from the Republic of Letters, that one of M. *Mebius*'s strongest reasons against Dr. *Van-Dale* was, that God forbid the Israelites to consult soothsayers, and the spirits of Python; whence he concludes, that Python, that is to say, the Dæmons, gave out the Oracles; and probably the story of the ghost of *Samuel* follows next. Dr. *Van-Dale* may answer what he pleases; but, for my part, I declare, that, under the name of Oracle, I do not include magic: in which it is not to be disputed but Dæmons are concerned; nor is magic at all included in what we commonly understand by the word [Oracle], not even according to the sense of the ancient heathens, who, on the one hand, regarded Oracles with respect as a part of their religion, and, on the other, had as great an abhorrence for magic as we have. To go and consult a necromancer or some sorcerers of Thesfaly, like *Erieto* in *Lucan*, was not called going to an Oracle; and this distinction must be observed also, that, admitting the common opinion, which affirms that Oracles ceased at the coming of *Christ*, yet no man

viii THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

can pretend that magic then ceased; so that the objection of M. *Mæbius* makes nothing against me, if he leaves the word [Oracle] in its ordinary and natural signification, as well ancient as modern.

The second thing I have to speak of is, that I am informed that the reverend father *Thomassin*, a priest of the oratory, famous for so many excellent books, wherein he has reconciled solid piety to profound learning, has robbed this book of the honour of first broaching this paradox, by treating Oracles as mere imposture, in his book called 'the method of studying and of teaching the poets *more Christiano*.' I confess, I was a little troubled at this; but I was pacified by reading the twenty-first chapter of his second book, where I found nothing coinciding with my opinion, save only a few words in the nineteenth article as follows: 'the true
' cause of silence being imposed on the Ora-
' cles was, that, by the incarnation of the
' divine *Logos*, truth shone out in the world,
' and diffused abundance of light in it far
' different from what was before: so that
' men saw into the delusions of Augurs and
' Astrologers, the inspectors of the entrails
' of beasts; and that these, with the Oracles
' in general, were mere impostures, where-

' by men deceived one another with obscure
 ' words, and double entendres. In fine, if
 ' there had been Oracles, in which the Dæ-
 ' mons gave answers, the coming of the In-
 ' carnate Truth had condemned the father
 ' of lyes to an eternal silence. It is, how-
 ' ever, very certain, that the Dæmons were
 ' consulted, whenever men had recourse to
 ' enchantments and magic, as *Lucan* reports
 ' of *Pompey* the younger, and as the scrip-
 ' ture assures us concerning *Saul*.' I agree,
 that in a large treatise, which only mentions
 Oracles occasionally, briefly, and without a-
 ny design of searching into the depth of the
 matter, it is indeed saying enough of them,
 to attribute most of the Oracles to the im-
 posture of men; to make a question, whe-
 ther there were any at all, in which Dæmons
 were concerned; to allow the Dæmons no
 further exercise than what comes within the
 compass of incantations and magic; and, in
 fine, to say that Oracles ceased not purely
 because the Son of God imposed silence on
 themall at once, but because minds, that were
 most enlightened by the publication of the
 gospel, were undeceived. This supposes
 there was still some human imposture that
 could not be detected so soon. However, in
 my opinion, a question, decided in so few

x THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

words, may be treated of anew, and as fully as the nature of it will admit, without any man's being justly offended by the repetition; for it is representing at large what the world has hitherto seen only in miniature, and so small, that its objects were scarce perceptible.

I hope I may be allowed, ere I conclude my preface, to make a short observation upon the stile I have used, which is that of familiar conversation. I imagined myself holding a discourse with my reader, and was the more easily induced to this way of writing, because I was under a sort of necessity of disputing with him: and the materials which I had in hand, being generally very susceptible of ridicule, engaged me in a manner of writing far different from the sublime; for I am of opinion that none ought to write in the sublime, but he who writes in his own defence, it is a stile so affected. I confess, that the low stile is yet something worse; but there is a medium of a very great latitude. The main difficulty is to chuse that, which is nicely adapted to the subject, and not to depart from it.



THE
HISTORY
OF
ORACLES.

MY design is not to give you directly a history of Oracles; I only intend to combat that common opinion which attributes them to Daemons, and will have them to cease at the coming of *Jesus Christ*. But in doing this it is necessary that I run through the whole history of Oracles; that I give an account of their original, their progress, the different manners in which they were delivered; and lastly, of their decay, with the same exactness as if I were in these matters pursuing the natural order and method of history.

It is not at all surprising, that philosophers should be so much puzzled in finding out the operations of nature: its principles are so hidden that it is rashness in human reason to think to discover them. But when the only enquiry is, whether the Oracles were a trick and artifice of the heathen priests, or not, where lies the difficulty? cannot we fallible mortals imagine how

far others may have been deceivers or dupes? but especially when the single question is, at what time Oracles ceased, what should occasion the least doubt? there are many books that treat of Oracles; let us see therefore at what time, or in what age, the last Oracles, of which we have any knowledge, were delivered.

Men are not willing to suffer the decision of things to be too easy; they mingle their own prejudices in the discussion, and so create much greater perplexities than are naturally in the things themselves; and those scruples, which only ourselves frame, give us the most pain to solve.

In my opinion this article of Oracles hath no considerable difficulty in it, but what we ourselves have raised. It was in its own nature a point of religion amongst the Pagans; is become so without any necessity amongst Christians, and on both sides it is loaded with prejudices which have obscured the clearest truths.

I confess the prejudices are not in themselves common to the true as well as false religions; for they reign chiefly in the false, which are only the contrivance of human understanding; but in the true (which is the work of God alone) there would none be ever found, if such human understanding could be prevented from intermeddling, and mixing something of its own with it; for what are all its new inventions but groundless prejudices, since it is not able to add any thing real or solid to the work of God.

Mean time these prejudices that are got into



the true religion are, as I may say, so closely interwoven with it, that they have attracted a respect to themselves, which is only due to the true religion; and we dare not censure the one for fear of attacking at the same time something that is sacred in the other. I do not reproach this excess of religion in those that are capable of it, but rather commend them; yet whatever praise they may deserve for it, it is undeniable that a just medium is much better; and that it is more reasonable to separate error from truth, than to reverence error that is mixed with truth. Christianity never wanted the support of false proofs; and less now than ever, from the pains the great men of this age have taken to establish it on its true foundations with greater power than ever the ancients did; and we ought to be filled with so just a confidence of our religion, as to reject the false advantages, which could not be neglected by any other sect.

Having laid this foundation, I advance to prove that Oracles, were they of what nature soever, were not delivered by Daemons, and that they did not cease at the coming of *Jesus Christ*. Each of these points well deserves a particular dissertation.

THE FIRST

DISSERTATION.

That ORACLES were not given out by DAEMONS.

IT is certain that there are Daemons, and evil Genii, condemned to eternal torment. Religion teaches us this; and then reason tells us that these Daemons might have animated statues, and delivered Oracles, if God had permitted them so to do. We are therefore only to enquire whether they had such divine permission or no.

It is only then a matter of fact which is in dispute; and this matter of fact depending wholly on the will of God, it was of such a nature, that it ought to have been revealed to us, if the knowledge thereof had been necessary for us.

But the holy scriptures do not teach us any where that Oracles were delivered by Daemons; and therefore we are at liberty to choose either side of the question; for it is of the number of those things that the divine wisdom has thought so indifferent as to leave to our own decision.

Nevertheless it is agreed on by all parties, that there was something supernatural in Oracles; whence comes this concurrence? the reason of it is easily found, as to what regards the present age: for since it was believed in the first ages of Christianity that Oracles were delivered by Daemons, this seems a sufficient cause for us to believe it now; for whatever has been delivered by

the ancients, good or bad, is like to be favourably rehearsed; and what they themselves could not prove by sufficient reasons, is in our days proved by their authority alone. If they foresaw this, they did very well not to give themselves always the trouble of reasoning too nicely. But let us inquire into the reasons why the primitive Christians believed that Oracles had something supernatural in them, and we will afterwards examine their solidity.

C H A P. I.

The first Reason why the Primitive Christians believed that ORACLES were delivered by DÆMONS. The surprising stories that were published concerning ORACLES and the GENII.

ANTIQUITY, abounds with surprising stories of Oracles, which, it was believed, could only be attributed to the Genii: I will relate but a few examples, as a specimen of what the rest were.

All the world knows what happened to the pilot *Thamus*: his ship being one evening near certain islands in the *Ægean* sea, the winds were hushed on a sudden: all the ship's crew were awake, and the greatest part of them carousing, when on a sudden a voice was heard from the islands, calling for *Thamus*. *Thamus* suffered himself to be called twice before he spoke, but to the third call he returned an answer; and then the voice commanded him, that when he arrived at

a certain place, he should cry out 'that the great *Pan* was dead.' There was not a man in the ship who was not seized with fear and dread, and they consulted whether *Thamus* ought to obey the voice or not; but *Thamus* resolved that if, when they were arrived at the appointed place, there were wind enough to sail onwards, he would pass by without saying any thing; but if the vessel was becalmed, he then would acquit himself of the order he had received. But being surprised with a calm in that very place, he cried out with all his force, 'that the great *Pan* was dead.' Scarce had he given over speaking, but they heard from every side groans and complaints as of a great multitude surprised and afflicted at this news. All those who were in the ship were witnesses of this odd affair; the fame of which spread itself in a little time as far as Rome; and the emperor *Tiberius*, having a desire to see *Thamus* himself, assembled a great number of such as were learned in the Pagan theology to know of them who this great *Pan* was, and it was concluded that he was the son of *Mercury* and *Penelope*. Thus in *Plutarch's* dialogues (where he treats of the cessation of Oracles) *Cleombrotus* tells this story, and says he had it of *Epithersis* his grammar master, who was in the ship with *Thamus* when this thing happened.

Thulis * was a king of Egypt, whose empire extended as far as the ocean: it is he who (as they said) gave the name of Thule to the isle now called Iceland. As his empire probably reached thi-

* *Suidas*.

ther, it was of a large extent. This king, puffed up with pride at his success and prosperity, went to the Oracle of *Scrapis*, and thus accosted it: 'thou that commandest fire, and governest the course of the heavens, tell me the truth: was there ever, or will there ever be, any one so puissant as myself?'

The Oracle answered him thus.

'First *God*, then the *Word* and *Spirit*, all uniting in one, whose power can never end. Be gone hence immediately, thou mortal, whose life is always uncertain.' And *Thulis* at his going thence had his throat cut.

Eusebius has collected from the writings of *Porphyrius*, that great enemy to the Christians, these following Oracles.

1. 'Grone, ye *Tripodes*, *Apollo* leaves you; he is forced to leave you by a celestial light. *Jupiter* has been, is, and ever will be: oh great *Jupiter*! alas! my famous Oracles are no more.'

2. 'The voice can return no more to the priests; she has been already condemned to silence this great while. Make such sacrifices always to *Apollo*, as are worthy of a God.'

3. 'Wretched man, said *Apollo* to one of his priests, interrogate me no more concerning the holy Father, nor his only Son, nor the Spirit which is the soul of all things: it is this Spirit that chaces me for ever from these abodes.'

Augustus * being grown old, and designing to

* *Suidas, Nicephorus, Cedrenus.*

choose a successor, went to consult the Oracle of Delphos. The Oracle returned no answer, although *Augustus* spared no sacrifice; but in the end he drew from it this following:

‘ The Hebrew Infant, to whom all the gods pay obedience, chaces me hence, and sends me in-
‘ to hell. Depart this temple, and say no more.’

It is easy to see, that upon the credit of such stories they could not doubt, that Daemons employed themselves in pronouncing Oracles. This great *Pan* (who died in the reign of *Tiberius*, as did *Jesus Christ*) was the master of the Daemons, whose empire was ruined by the death of a God of such salvation to the universe: or, if this explanation do not please you, (for I hope we may without impiety put contrary constructions upon one and the same thing, although it be of a religious concern) this great *Pan* was *Jesus Christ* himself, whose death caused so general a grief and consternation among the Daemons, who from that time could no more exercise their tyranny over mankind: thus a way has been found out to give two faces very different to this great *Pan*.

Could the Oracle delivered to king *Thulis* (an Oracle so positive concerning the holy Trinity) be human fiction? how could the priest of *Serapis* have divined so great a mystery, unknown then to all the world, even to the Jews themselves?

If these Oracles were delivered by priests, who were impostors, which obliged them to discredit one another, and publish the cessation of their Oracles; is it not visible, that God forced the Daemons themselves to bear witness to the truth?

besides, why did the Oracles cease, if they were only delivered by priests?

C H A P. II.

The Second Reason why the Primitive Christians believed that ORACLES were supernatural; and the Agreement of this Opinion with the System of Christianity.

THAT there are Dæmons, being once allowed by christianity, it was natural enough to find them as much employment as possible, and not to refuse them the power of delivering Oracles, and working the other Pagan miracles, which seemed to have need of it. Thus the ancients saved themselves the trouble of entering into a discussion of matters which would have been tedious and difficult: and all that was surprising and extraordinary was ascribed to the Dæmons they had to do with: by this alone they seemed to confirm their existence, and the religion itself that reveals it to us.

Moreover, it is certain, that about the time of the birth of *Jesus Christ*, mention is often made of the cessation of Oracles even in prophane authors. Now, why this time, rather than any other, was destined for the cessation of them is very easily accounted for, according to the system of the Christian religion. God had chosen his people out of the Jewish nation, and left the empire of the rest of the world to Dæmons till the coming of his Son; but then, he deprived them of that power,

which he permitted them to have before. His will then was, that every knee should bend to *Jesus Christ*; and that nothing should hinder the establishment of his kingdom over all nations. There is something so happy in this thought, that I do not wonder it has made so great a progress. This is one of those things, to the truth of which we so easily give credit, and which convince us, because we are willing to believe them true.

C H A P. III.

*The Third Reason of the Primitive Christians, viz.
The Agreement of their Opinion with the Philosophy of PLATO.*

NEVER was any philosophy more in vogue than that of *Plato* during the first ages of the church: the Pagans were of different sects of the Philosophers; but the conformity which *Plato's* was found to have with religion, carried almost all the knowing Christians into that sect alone. Thence came their esteem and fondness for *Plato*: they looked upon him as a sort of Prophet who had foretold many important points of christianity, especially that of the holy Trinity; which nobody can deny to be clearly enough contained in his writings: nay, they went so far as to take his works for comments on the scripture; and had the same conception of the nature of the Logos, or Word, as he had. He supposed God so far exalted above the creatures, that he did not believe they came immediately out of his hands; and

therefore the Philosopher put between them and him this Word, as a step by which the act of God might pass down to them: the Christians embraced the same idea of *Jesus Christ*: and this may perhaps be the reason why no herefy has been more generally espoused, and maintained with greater heat, than Arianism.

This Platonism, which seemed to do honour to the Christian religion, fully maintained the existence of Daemons; which was from thence naturally adopted into the Christians notion of Oracles.

Plato thought Daemons are of a nature between that of the gods and that of men; that they are aerial Genii appointed as messengers between the gods and us; that although they are near us, yet we cannot see them; that they penetrate into all our thoughts; that they have a love for the good, and a hatred for the bad; and that it was for their honour that such variety of sacrifices, and so many different ceremonies were appointed.

It does not from hence appear, that *Plato* acknowledged any evil Dæmons, to which might be attributed the management of the imposture of Oracles. *Plutarch* notwithstanding assures us *, that *Plato* owned there were such; and among the Platonical Philosophers, the thing is out of all doubt. *Eusebius*, in his Evangelical Preparation †, recites a great number of passages of *Porphyrus*, where that Pagan Philosopher assures us, that the evil Dæmons are the authors of enchantments, philtres, and witchcrafts; that they only deceive our

* Dialogue of the ceasing of Oracles.

† Lib. iv. v. vi.

eyes with spectres and phantoms; that lying is essential to their nature; that they raise in us the greatest part of our passions; and that they have an ambition to be thought gods; that their aerial and spiritual bodies are nourished with suffumigations, blood, and the fat of sacrifices; and that it is only these that undertake to give out Oracles, and to whom this office so full of imposture is allotted: in short at the head of this troop of evil Daemons he places *Hecate* and *Serapis*.

*Jamblichus**, another Platonist, has said as much; and the greatest part of these things being true, the Christians received them all with joy, and have added to them besides a little of their own: as for example, that the Dæmons stole from the writings of the Prophets some knowledge of things to come; and so got honour by it in their Oracles.

This system of the ancient Christians had this advantage, that it discovered to the Pagans by their own principles the original of their false worship, and the source of those errors which they always maintained. They were persuaded that there was something supernatural in their Oracles; and the Christians, who had disputes with them, did not desire to confute this opinion. Thus the Daemons, in whose nature both were agreed, helped to explain all that was supernatural in them. They acknowledged indeed this sort of ordinary miracles wrought in the Pagans religion; but then they deprived them of all the advantage of it, by imputing them to such authors. And this was

* *Tertullian* in his *Apologies*.

a much more short and easy way than to contest the miracle it self by a long train of enquiries and arguments. Thus I have shewn you how that opinion, which the first ages of the church had of the Pagan Oracles, was established. I might to the three reasons, which I have already brought, add a fourth, as good perhaps as those: that is, that in the system of Oracles being given by Daemons, there is something marvelous: and whoever has studied the humour of mankind a little, will find how much we are taken with the marvelous. But I do not intend to expatiate on this reflection; for they who think upon it will easily believe me, without my being at any pains to prove it, and those, that do not, will perhaps give it no credit, notwithstanding all my proofs.

Let us now examine the several reasons which men have had to believe Oracles to be supernatural.

C H A P. IV.

*That the surprising stories told of ORACLES
ought to be suspected.*

IT would be difficult to account for those stories and Oracles which we have mentioned, without having recourse to Daemons. But then the question is, whether all this be true? let us be well assured of the matter of fact, before we trouble our selves with enquiring into the cause. It is true, that this method is too slow for the

greatest part of mankind, who run naturally to the cause, and pass over the truth of the matter of fact; but for my part, I will not be so ridiculous as to find out a cause for what is not.

This kind of misfortune happened so pleasantly, at the end of the last age, to some learned Germans, that I cannot forbear speaking of it. 'In the year 1593, there was a report that the teeth of a child of Silesia of seven years old dropped out, and that one of gold came in the place of one of his great teeth. *Horstius*, a professor of physic in the university of Helmstad, wrote in the year 1595, the history of this tooth, and pretended that it was partly natural, and partly miraculous, and that it was sent from God to this child, to comfort the Christians who were then afflicted by the Turks.' Now fancy to your self what a consolation this was, and what this tooth could signify, either to the Christians or the Turks. In the same year (that this tooth of gold might not want for historians) one *Rullandus* wrote the history of it: two years after, *Ingolsteterus*, another learned man, wrote against the opinion of *Rullandus* concerning this golden tooth; and *Rullandus* presently makes a fine learned reply. *Libavius*, another great man, collected all that had been said of this tooth, to which he added his own opinion. After all, there wanted nothing to so many famous works, but the truth of its being a tooth of gold. When a Goldsmith had examined it, he found, that it was only a leaf of gold laid on the tooth with a great deal of art. Thus

they first compiled books, and then they consulted the Goldsmith.

Nothing is more natural than to do the same thing in all other cases. And I am not so much convinced of our ignorance, by the things that are, and of which the reasons are unknown, as by those which are not, and for which we yet find out reasons. That is to say, as we want those principles that lead us to the truth, so we have others which agree exceeding well with that which is false.

Some learned naturalists have found out the reason why places under ground are hot in the winter, and cold in the summer; and greater than they have since discovered that this is not a fact.

Historical discussions are still more liable to this error. For, when we argue from what is said in history, what assurances have we that these historians were not prejudiced, nor credulous, nor misinformed, nor negligent? It is necessary therefore that we should look out for one that was an eye-witness of all those things of which he writes, impartial and accurate. When men write of such facts, especially as have a relation to religion, it is very hard not to favour, according to the party of which they are, a false religion with advantages that are not due to it; or not to give a true one those false props of which it has no need. And yet we may be assured that we can never add more truth to what is true already, nor make that true which is false.

Some Christians in the first ages, for want of being informed or convinced of this maxim, were so prepossessed in favour of Christianity, as to introduce very bold suppositions which the founder part of Christians afterwards disowned. This inconsiderate zeal produced a vast number of apocryphal books, to which were given the names of Pagan or Jewish authors; for the church, having to deal with these two sorts of enemies, what could she do better than to fight them with their own weapons, by producing books, which, though written, as was pretended, by their party, were nevertheless very much in favour of Christianity? But by all their struggle to draw from these counterfeit works some very great benefit to their religion, they gained none at all; for the clearness of their stile betrayed them; and our mysteries are therein so plainly unfolded, as if the Prophets of the Old and New Testament understood nothing in comparison of those Jewish and Pagan authors. And what plea soever may be urged to save the reputation of those books, too great clearness will always appear in them, a difficulty not to be surmounted. As some Christians fathered spurious books on Pagans and Jews, Heretics made no scruple to father theirs on the orthodox. There was nothing to be met with but false gospels, false epistles of the Apostles, and false histories of their lives; and it can only be ascribed to the divine providence that the truth has been separated from so many apocryphal works, as confounded it.

Some great men of the church have sometimes

been deceived both by the spurious works of Heretics fathered upon the orthodox, and by what the Christians fathered upon the Pagans or Jews; but ofteneft by the latter. For they feldom examined ftrictly enough what they thought favourable to religion; the heat with which they contended for fo good a caufe, not giving them the liberty always to make a good choice of their weapons. This is the reafon that they have happened fometimes to make ufe of the books of the Sibyls, or thofe of *Hermes Trismegiftus* king of Egypt.

This is not meant to leffen the authority, or to censure the merit, of thofe great men. For after having obferved all the errors into which perhaps they have fallen, in fome facts there will ftill remain abundance of folid reasonings, and very curious discoveries, which are worthy of our higheft admiration. And if, with the true proofs of our religion, they have left us others which may be fufpected, it is our part to receive that only from them which is authentic; and to pardon their zeal, who have furnifhed us with more proofs than there was any neceffity for.

I am not at all furprized that this fame zeal made them believe, that the Oracles, I know not how many, advantageous to their religion, which were current in the firft ages of the church, were true. The authors of the books of the Sibyls, and thofe of *Hermes Trismegiftus*, were probably the authors alfo of thefe Oracles; at leaft it was more natural to fuppoſe them fuch, than the au-

thors of intire volumes. The story of *Thamus* is originally Pagan, and yet *Eusebius*, and other great authors, have done it the honour to believe it, though it is immediately followed in *Plutarch* with another so ridiculous as is enough to destroy its credit. For *Demetrius* says there, that most of the islands near England are desert, and consecrated to Daemons and Heroes, and that being sent by the emperor to take a survey of these islands, he landed upon one of those that were inhabited; and that, a little time after his arrival, there happened a tempest and terrible claps of thunder and lightening, which made the people of the country give out that some one of their principal Daemons was dead; because their deaths were always attended with something strange and horrible. To this *Demetrius* adds, that one of those islands was the prison of *Saturn*, who was guarded there by *Briareus*, and was buried in eternal sleep (which, methinks, should render the giant a very needless guard) incompassed with an infinite number of Daemons waiting at his feet as slaves.

Has not *Demetrius* given a very curious relation of his voyage? And is it not pleasant to see such a philosopher as *Plutarch* relate such wonders so gravely? It is not without reason that *Herodotus* is esteemed the father of history; all the Greek writers, who are on that supposition his offspring, partake of his genius. They have little truth, but much of the marvellous and amusing. Be this as it will, if the story of *Tha-*

mus had no other faults, its being found in the same treatise with the Daemons of *Demetrius* were enough to damn it.

But besides this, it is not capable of a rational construction. For if the great god *Pan* were a Daemon, could not the Daemons have notified his death to one another without employing *Thamus*? Have they not other ways of informing one another of news? And moreover, can they be so imprudent as to expose their misfortunes, and the frailty of their natures to mankind? God compelled them to it, perhaps, you will say. Then God had some design in it. But let us see what followed upon it; there was no person convinced of the error of Paganism, by having heard of the death of the great *Pan*. It was agreed that he was the son of *Mercury* and *Penelope*, and that it was not he that was acknowledged in Arcadia for God of all, as his name imports; and therefore though the voice named him the great *Pan*, yet he was understood to be but the little *Pan*, whose death was of no great consequence, and does not seem to have been much lamented.

If this great *Pan* were *Jesus Christ*, the Daemons only told men the news of a death so salutary to them because God compelled them to it. But what was the effect of all this? did any one understand the name of *Pan* in its true sense? *Plutarch* lived in the second age of the church, and yet no person then knew that *Pan* was *Jesus Christ*, who died in Judea.

The story of *Thulis* is related by *Suidas* (an

author who has collected a great many things, but ill enough chosen.) His Oracle of *Serapis* is guilty of the same fault as the books of the Sibyls; that is, of being too clear concerning our mysteries. But after all, we are certain that this *Thulis*, king of Egypt, was not one of the *Ptolomys*; and what then will become of the old Oracle, if *Serapis* must needs be a god first brought into Egypt by a *Ptolomy*, who sent for him out of Pontus, as many learned men pretended from very strong probabilities? at least it is certain that *Herodotus*, who has written so much about old Egypt, does not mention *Serapis*; and that *Tacitus* relates at large how and why one of the *Ptolomys* brought from Pontus the god *Serapis*, which was then known no where else.

The Oracle said to be given to *Augustus*, concerning the Hebrew Child, is by no means to be received. *Cedrenus* quotes *Eusebius* for it; but at this day there is no such thing to be found there. It is not impossible but *Cedrenus* might make a false quotation, or quote some work wrongly attributed to *Eusebius*. He is a fine historian to relate, upon the credit of certain forged acts of *St. Peter*, which were even current in his time, ‘ that *Simon* the Magician had at his gate a great ‘ dog, which devoured all those that his master ‘ would not have enter; and that *St. Peter*, coming to speak with *Simon*, commanded the dog to ‘ go and tell his master, in human language, that ‘ *Peter*, the servant of God, would speak with ‘ him: that the dog went and performed that ‘ command, to the great amazement of such as

‘were then with *Simon*. Nay, that *Simon*, to
 ‘shew that he knew as much as *St. Peter*, bid
 ‘the dog go and tell him, that he might enter :
 ‘which the dog immediately did.’ Hence you
 may see what it is the Greeks called writing history.
Cedrenus lived in an ignorant age, when the li-
 centiousness of writing fables with impunity tallied
 with the general inclination of the Greeks.

But though *Eusebius*, in some work of his,
 which has not come down to our hands, had
 actually treated of the Oracle of *Augustus*, yet we
 find *Eusebius* himself is sometimes mistaken ; of
 which there are evident proofs. The first defend-
 ers of Christianity, *Justin*, *Tertullian*, *Theophilus*,
Tatian, would they have said nothing of an Ora-
 cle so much in favour of their religion ? Had
 they so little zeal as to neglect such an advantage ?
 Nay, even they *, who give us this oracle, spoil
 it by adding, that *Augustus* on his return to Rome
 caused an altar to be set up in the capitol with this
 inscription, ‘This is the altar of the only Son,
 ‘or eldest Son, of God’ Whence had he the
 idea of this only Son of God, of which the Ora-
 cle makes no mention ? In short, what is more
 observable is, that *Augustus* after the voyage he
 made into Greece, nineteen years before the birth
 of *Jesus Christ*, never went thither again, and when
 he returned from thence, he was not in a humour
 to erect altars to any god but himself: for he
 suffered not only the cities † of Asia to raise altars
 to him, and celebrate holidays in his honour ;

* *Cedrenus*, *Suidas*, *Niceph.*

† *Tacitus*, *Dion Cassius*.

but also that at Rome they should consecrate one to *Fortune returning*, *Fortunae reduci*, that was to say, to himself, and that they keep the day of his so happy a return as a festival.

The oracles, which *Eusebius* relates from *Porphyrius*, seemed more perplexing than all the rest: for *Eusebius* would not have charged *Porphyrius* with Oracles of which he made no mention, and *Porphyrius*, who was so attached to Paganism, would not have quoted false Oracles concerning the cessation of Oracles themselves, and to the advantage of the Christian religion: this is a case, it seems, in which the testimony of an enemy has a great deal of weight.

But, on the other hand, *Porphyrius* was not so unskilful a man, as to furnish the Christians with weapons against Paganism, without being necessarily forced to it by the consequence of some argument; which does not appear to be the case here. If these Oracles had been alleged by the Christians, and if *Porphyrius*, owning that they were actually delivered, had denied the consequences drawn from them, it is certain that they would have then been of very great weight.

But it is from *Porphyrius* himself that the Christians (as appears by the example of *Eusebius*) fetch these Oracles; that very *Porphyrius* who takes pleasure to ruin his own religion, and to establish another. The truth is, this is suspicious of itself, and yet it becomes more so, by his pushing the thing so far; for we are told from him of I know not how many Oracles very clear and positive, concerning the person of *Jesus*

Christ, his resurrection and ascension. In fine, the most bigotted and learned of the Pagans hath given us abundant proofs of Christianity; but we may well suspect so much generosity.

Eusebius believed it a very great advantage to be able to place *Porphyrus* at the head of so many Oracles in favour of religion; and he gives them us stripped of the additions to them in the writings of *Porphyrus*. How do we know, whether he did not refute them? If he had consulted the interest of his cause, he ought to have done it; and if he did not do it, certainly he had some hidden intention.

It is to be suspected, that *Porphyrus* was wicked enough to frame false Oracles, and present them to Christians, with a design of ridiculing their credulity, if they should receive them for true, and think to support their religion by such props: and then he would have drawn consequences from it of much greater importance than those Oracles, and have attacked the whole Christian system with this instance, which however would not have been conclusive.

It is very certain, that this same *Porphyrus*, who furnished us with all these Oracles, maintained, as we have remarked, that they were delivered by lying spirits; it may very well then be imagined, that he placed all the mysteries of our religion in the Oracles, purely to destroy the credit of them, and to render them suspected of forgery, as being attested by false witnesses. I know the Christians did not take it in that sense; yet since they had never proved by any argument,

that the Daemons were some times forced to speak the truth, *Porphyrius* was always in a condition to make use of his Oracles against them. And therefore, by the nature of the dispute, they ought to have denied, that there were ever any Oracles, as we do at this present. This is a plain reason to me why *Porphyrius* was so profuse of Oracles in favour of our religion. But what would have been the success of the great controversy between the Christians and Pagans, we can only conjecture; for all the papers are not come to our hands. Thus by examining things a little closely, we find that the Oracles, which were reckoned such wonders, never were in being; of which I need not give any more instances, all the rest being of the same nature.

C H A P. V.

That the common opinion concerning Oracles does not agree so well as it is imagined with the Christian religion.

THE silence of the scriptures concerning these evil Daemons, which it is pretended were the managers of the Oracles, hath not only left us at liberty to believe nothing of them, but naturally inclines us to believe the contrary; for, can it be possible that the scriptures would not have acquainted the Jews and Christians of a thing which it so extremely imported them to know, and which they could never have guessed at by

their natural reason, that they might not be staggered in their own religion, by seeing things so surprising in another? For I conceive that God only spoke to men to supply the weakness of their understanding, which of itself was not sufficient for their occasions; and that whatsoever he has not declared to them, is either of such a nature that they may learn it themselves, or that it is not necessary they should know it. So that if the Oracles had been delivered by evil Daemons, God would have made it known to us, to have prevented us from believing that he himself delivered them, or that there was any thing divine in false religions.

David reproached the Pagans with gods that had mouths and spake not, and wishes that their adorers, for a punishment, might become like those they adored; but if these gods had not only the use of speech, but also the knowledge of things to come, I see no reason *David* had thus to reproach the Pagans, nor why they should be angry for being like to their gods.

When the holy fathers inveigh, with so much reason, against the worship of Idols, they always argue from the impotency of them; but if they had spoken, if they had predicted things to come, then they ought not to have contemned their impotency, but should rather have disabused the people, and confessed the extraordinary power that was in them: in fine, would they have been so much to blame for adoring what they believed was animated by a divine virtue, or at least a virtue more than human? It is true, that these

Daemons were enemies to God ; but could the Pagans know that ? As the Daemons required ceremonies that were barbarous and extravagant, the Pagans believed them fantastical or cruel, but nevertheless they believed them more powerful than men ; nor did they know that the true God offered men his protection against them. For the most part, they only submitted themselves to their gods as to formidable enemies, who were to be appeased at any rate ; nor had this submission and fear been groundless, if the Daemons actually gave proofs of their power over nature. In fine, Paganism, though a worship abominable in the sight of God, would have been but an involuntary and an excusable error.

You will say, if the false priests always deceived the laity, then Paganism was no more than a simple error into which the credulous people fell, whilst their real intention was to honour a superior being.

But the case is much otherwise ; for it behoves men to be on their guard against errors, into which other men may lead them ; but there is no possibility of fore-arming themselves against those errors into which they may be led by Genii, or Daemons which are above themselves. The light of my reason is sufficient to examine whether a statue speaks or not, but from the moment that it does speak, I cannot help thinking it a divinity. In a word, God is only obliged, by the laws of his goodness, to protect me from those impositions from which I cannot defend myself ;

as

as for other things, it is incumbent on my reason to do its office.

○ We see also that when God permitted the Daemons to work miracles, he at the same time confounded them by working greater. *Pharaoh* was liable to be deceived by his Magicians, but *Moses* was still more powerful than the Magicians of *Pharaoh*. The Daemons never had more power, or did more surprizing things, than in the time of *Jesus Christ* and the Apostles.

○ This hinders not but that Paganism with justice hath been always called the worship of Daemons. For, in the first place, the Pagans idea of the divinity does not at all agree with the true God, but with the reprobate and eternally unhappy Genii. Secondly, the design of the Heathens was not so much to adore the first being, the source of all good, as those evil beings of whose anger or caprice they stood in fear. In fine, the Daemons, who have without contradiction the power of tempting men, and laying snares for them, countenanced as much as ever they could the gross errors of the Pagans, and made them blind to palpable impostures. From hence it is said that Paganism was upheld not by miracles, but by the tricks of the Daemons; which supposes that in whatever they did there was nothing of reality or truth, nor of such power as effectually to make a statue speak.

○ Nevertheless, it is possible that God has sometimes permitted the Daemons to animate idols: but if this ever happened, God had his reasons

for it, which are always worthy of profound veneration ; but generally speaking there was never any such thing. God permitted the devil to burn the houses of Job, and lay his pastures desolate ; to kill all his cattle, to afflict his body with a thousand sores, but it must not therefore be said that the devil is let loose on all those to whom such misfortunes happen. When we talk of any man's being sick or ruined, we do not think that the devil is concerned in it. The case of Job is a particular case, on which our argument has no dependance, and our general reasoning never excludes the exceptions that the almighty power of God may make to all things.

It is apparent then, that the common opinion concerning Oracles does not very well agree with the goodness of God, and that it discharges Paganism of great part of the extravagances and abominations which the holy fathers always found in it. The Pagans might have said in their own justification, that it was no wonder they should obey those spirits which animated statues, and every day performed a hundred extraordinary things ; and the Christians, to take from them all excuse, ought never to have yielded them this point. If the whole Pagan religion had been no other than an imposture of the priests, Christianity had an advantage from the excessive ridiculousness of it.

Besides, there is great probability that the disputes between the Christians and Pagans were in that state when *Porphyrius* confesses so freely, that the Oracles were delivered by evil Daemons.

Of these evil Daemons he made a double use : he made use of them, as we have already seen, to render those Oracles unprofitable and even disadvantageous to the Christian religion, which the Christians thought were on their side ; and besides, he imputed all the folly and barbarity of an infinite number of sacrifices, which, without ceasing, they reproached the Pagans withal, to these cruel and crafty Genii. To prove therefore that Daemons were not the authors of the Oracles, is attacking *Porphyrus* in his last intrenchments, and espousing the true interest of Christianity.

C H A P. VI.

That Daemons are not sufficiently established by Platonism.

IN the first ages, poetry and philosophy were the same thing, and all wisdom was contained in verse. Poetry was no great gainer by this alliance, and philosophy still less. *Homer* and *Hesiod* were the first Grecian philosophers ; and thence it is that the other philosophers paid a very serious regard to whatever they said, and never quoted them but with great honour.

Homer very often confounds the Gods and Daemons together : but *Hesiod* distinguishes four species of reasonable natures, viz. the Gods, the Daemons, the Demi-Gods or Heroes, and Men. Nay, he goes farther yet, and notes the duration of the lives of Daemons : for the

nymphs, of which he speaks in the place I am going to quote, are these Daemons; and *Plutarch* understands it so.

‘ A crow, says *Hesiod*, lives nine times as long
‘ as a man, a stag four times as long as a crow,
‘ a raven three times as long as a stag, the phoenix nine times as long as a raven; and, in fine,
‘ the nymphs ten times as long as the phoenix.’
One would be apt to take this calculation for a mere poetic conceit, unworthy the reflections of a philosopher, or the imitation of a poet; for there is in it neither agreeableness nor truth: but *Plutarch* is not of this opinion; for as he found, that supposing the life of man to be seventy years, which is its ordinary duration, the Daemons then ought to live six hundred and eighty thousand and four hundred years: and as he did not conceive how any experiment of this so long life of the Daemons could be made, he rather believes that *Hesiod*, by the age of man, understood but one year. The interpretation is not very natural; but according to this estimation the life of the Daemons is not above nine thousand, seven hundred and twenty years, and then *Plutarch* could easily conceive the possibility of finding out how Daemons could live so long. And besides, he remarks in the number of nine thousand, seven hundred and twenty years, certain Pythagorean perfections, which render it altogether capable to denote the term of the lives of Daemons. These were the so much boasted reasonings of antiquity. After the poems of *Homer* and *Hesiod*, we find the Dae-

mons in the Philosophy of *Plato*, who can never be too much commended, since it is he, of all the Greeks, who has conceived the highest idea of God; though even this plunged him in false notions. Because God is infinitely exalted above men, he believed that there must be middle beings between him and us, to maintain a communication between two extremes so far distant, and thereby to convey the operations of the Deity down to us. 'God, says he, resembles a triangle, which has three sides equal; the Daemons are like a triangle that has but two sides equal; and Men are like a triangle which has all three sides unequal.' This idea is well enough fancied, if it were but as well founded.

But after all, may it be said, has not *Plato* reasoned justly? And do not we know for certain, by the Holy Scriptures, that there are Genii, or Spirits, ministers of the will of God, and his messengers to men? Is it not wonderful that *Plato* should discover this truth by the light of his natural reason?

I confess, that *Plato* has conjectured aright; nevertheless, I blame him for his conjecture. Divine revelation assures us of the existence of Angels and Daemons, but it is not within the sphere of human reason to assure us of it. He knows not what to make of the infinite space which is between God and Man, and therefore he fills it with Genii and Daemons: but with what shall that infinite space be filled, which is between God and these Genii, or Daemons themselves? For

the distance between God and any creature whatsoever is infinite. And if the action of God must traverse, as one may say, this infinite vacuum to go to the Daemons, it may as well reach even to Men, since they are farther off but by very few degrees, which bear no proportion to the first distance. When God treats with men by the ministry of Angels, it is not to be understood that Angels are necessary for this communication, as *Plato* pretends; God employs them for reasons, into which philosophy can never penetrate, and which can never be perfectly known but by himself.

According to that idea, which the comparison of the triangles gives us, we find that *Plato* framed this notion of Daemons, to the end we might mount from one creature to another creature more perfect, till at length we ascended to God himself. So that God would have but some degrees of perfection more than the highest creature; but it is visible, that as they are all infinitely imperfect in respect of him, because they are all infinitely distant from him; so the differences of perfection, which are between the creatures, vanish as soon as they are compared with God; for what raises them one above another, does not bring them in any proportion near to him.

And if we only consult human reason, there is no need of Spirits either to transmit the action of God to Men, nor of placing between God and us any thing that approaches him nearer than we can.

Perhaps *Plato* himself was not so sure of the

existence of his Daemons, as the Platonists have since been. What makes me suspect this is, that he places Love in the number of the Daemons; for he often mixes gallantry with philosophy; and his talent was not the meanest on that subject. He says, that Love is the son of the god of riches, by poverty: that from his father he derives his great courage, his exalted notions, his inclination to give, his prodigality, and his confidence in his own strength, his good opinion of his own merit, and ambition to have always the preference. But that he derives from his mother that indigence which makes him always asking, that importunity with which he asks, that timidity which hinders him often from daring to ask, that disposition which he has to servitude, and that fear of being despised, which he can never lose. This, in my opinion, is one of the prettiest fables that was ever invented. It is pleasant to find *Plato* sometimes writing in a stile as gay and humorous, and that too with as little solidity, as *Anacreon* could himself have done. This description of the pedigree of Love extremely well sets forth all the fantasticalness of its nature: but we know not what to make of Daemons, if Love must pass for one.

It does not appear that *Plato* understood this in a natural and philosophical sense, nor that he meant that Love was a being out of us, or extrinsecal, inhabiting the air: certainly he meant this only in a gay sense. And then we are at our liberty to believe, that all his Daemons are of the same kind with Love. And, since he wan-

tonly mingles fables with his system, he cares not much if the rest of his system pass for a fable.

Hitherto we have only answered the reasons urged for the opinion that Oracles had something in them supernatural. We will now begin to confute his hypothesis.

C H A P. VII.

That the great sects of the Pagan Philosophers did not believe there was any thing supernatural in Oracles.

IF in the midst of Greece itself, where all places resound with Oracles, we had maintained that they were but impostures, no one would have been astonished with the boldness of the paradox; and we should have been in no need of taking any measures to vent it in secret. The Philosophers were divided on the subject of Oracles; the Platonists and Stoics were for them, but the Cynics, Peripatetics, and Epicureans made a perfect jest of them. Whatever there was of the marvellous in the Oracles, half the wise men of Greece were still at liberty to believe nothing of them; and this notwithstanding the common prejudice of the Grecians; which is a thing worth nothing.

Eusebius † tells us that six hundred Heathen authors wrote against the Oracles; but of all these, in my opinion, *Oenomaus*, (of whom he makes mention, and of whom he has preserved

† Lib. 4. of his Evang. Preparation.

some fragments) is one, the loss of whose works is to be the most lamented.

In those fragments of his that remain, it is pleasant to find this *Oenomaus*, full of the cynical liberty, arguing upon every Oracle against the God who delivered it, and calling him to an account. See, for instance, how he treats the God of Delphos, on his following answer to *Croesus*.

'*Croesus*, in passing the river Halis, shall subvert a great empire.'

In fact, *Croesus* passing the river Halis attacked *Cyrus*, who, as all the world knows, fell furiously upon him, and deprived him of all his dominions.

'You boasted, says *Oenomaus* to *Apello*, in another Oracle delivered to *Croesus*, that you knew the number of the grains of sand in the sea; you set a great value upon yourself, because you saw, from Delphos, the Tortoise, which, by order of *Croesus*, was then dressing in Lydia. A noble discovery this to be so proud of! But when you were consulted concerning the success of the war between *Croesus* and *Cyrus*, there you was at a stand. If you can divine what shall happen in time to come, to what purpose do you make use of forms of speech which cannot be understood? Do you not know that they will not be understood? If you do know it, you then take pleasure to make us your sport; if you do not know it, let us inform you, that you ought to speak more clearly, and that you are not understood.

'I tell you also, as you chose to use double entendres, the Greek phrase, by which you ex-

' preſs that *Croefus* ſhall ſubvert a great empire,
 ' is not well choſen, and that it can ſignify no-
 ' thing elſe but a victory of *Croefus* over *Cyrus*.
 ' If things muſt needs happen, wherefore doſt
 ' thou amuſe us with thy ambiguities? What
 ' doſt thou do at Delphos, wretchedly employed
 ' as thou art in ſinging idle, uſeleſs prophe-
 ' cies? To what purpoſe do we make thee
 ' ſo many ſacrifices? What fury poſſeſſes us?'

But *Oenomaus* is yet more out of humour with
 the Oracle which *Apollo* delivered to the Athe-
 nians, when *Xerxes* fell upon Greece with all the
 forces of Aſia. The Pythian Oracle gave them
 for answer,

' That *Minerva*, the protectreſs of Athens, en-
 ' deavoured all manner of ways, but in vain, to
 ' appeaſe the anger of *Jupiter*; but nevertheleſs
 ' *Jupiter*, for the ſake of his daughter, conſent-
 ' ed to ſuffer the Athenians to ſave themſelves in
 ' walls of wood; and that *Salamine* ſhould ſee
 ' the deſtruction of many children dear to their
 ' mothers; either when *Ceres* ſhould be ſcattered
 ' abroad, or when ſhe ſhould be gathered in.'

Upon this *Oenomaus* loſes all manner of reſpect
 for the god of Delphos.

' This controverſy between the father and the
 ' daughter, ſays he, is very becoming to the
 ' Gods! That there ſhould be in heaven ſuch
 ' contrary intereſts and inclinations is excellent!
 ' *Jupiter* is angry with Athens, he brings down
 ' all the forces of Aſia againſt it; but if he could
 ' not have ruined it otherways, if he had no
 ' more thunder left, if he was reduced to borrow

‘ foreign forces, how had he it then in his power
‘ to make all the forces of Asia come down a-
‘ gainst this town ? Yet after this he suffers them
‘ to save themselves in walls of wood ; on whom
‘ then was his anger to fall ? what, on the stones ?
‘ Rare diviner ! With all your conjuration you
‘ know not whose these children shall be that
‘ Salamine shall see the destruction of, whether
‘ Greeks or Persians ; though they must be either
‘ of one or the other army. Do not you at least
‘ know, that we shall soon see you do not know
‘ which ? You conceal the time of the battle un-
‘ der these poetical expressions, ‘ when *Ceres* shall
‘ be scattered, or when she shall be gathered in.’
‘ You think, by this pompous language, to cast
‘ a mist before our eyes ; but does not every bo-
‘ dy know that a naval battle must be fought ei-
‘ ther in seed-time or harvest ; surely it will not
‘ be in winter. But let what will happen, you
‘ will get yourself off by the means of this *Ju-*
‘ *piter*, whom *Minerva* endeavours to appease ;
‘ if the Grecians lose the battle, *Jupiter* was
‘ then inexorable ; if they gain it, then *Jupiter*
‘ suffered himself to be appeased. When you
‘ say, *Apollo* let them fly to walls of wood, you
‘ counsel, you do not divine. I, who know
‘ not what divination is, could have said as much
‘ as this. I should have judged indeed that the
‘ fury of the war would fall upon Athens ; and
‘ that since the Athenians had ships, the best
‘ thing they could do, was to abandon their city,
‘ and betake themselves to the sea.’

Such was the veneration that some great sects

of the philosophers had for Oracles, and for those very gods they thought the authors of them. It is very pleasant to think that all the Pagan religion was no more than one problem of philosophy. Do the gods take care of human affairs; or do they not? The question turns upon this main point, whether we shall worship them or neglect them; the people have been universally for adoration, and we every where see temples and sacrifices; yet a great sect of the philosophers maintains publicly that these sacrifices, these temples, these adorations, are all to no purpose, and that the gods, so far from delighting in them, take no notice of them. There is not a Grecian who does not consult the Oracles concerning his affairs; but this does not prevent their being publicly treated in three great schools of philosophy as absolute impostures.

Let me beg leave to carry this reflection a little farther, which may serve for a fuller discovery of the Pagan religion. The Grecians in general had an extraordinary genius, but they were fickle, curious, restless, and gave way to passion; and, to declare my whole opinion of them, their wit overswayed their judgment. The Romans had quite another character; they were solid, serious, and industrious, they knew how to pursue a design, and could foresee the consequences of it at a great distance. I should not be surprized that the Grecians, without thinking of consequences, should rashly treat *pro* and *con* of every thing; that while they were making oblations they should

should dispute whether those sacrifices could reach to the gods; and that they should consult Oracles without being assured whether they were not mere delusions. The philosophers probably concerned themselves so little in the government, that they took no care not to shock religion in their disputes; and perhaps the people had not faith enough in the philosophers to abandon their religion, or change any thing in it upon their word. In fine, the predominant passion in the Greeks was to discourse on all subjects at all events. Yet doubtless it is more astonishing that the Romans, and the ablest men among them too, and who knew best of how much consequence religion was to politics, should venture to publish works that did not only call their religion in question, but also turned it into perfect ridicule. I particularly point at Cicero, who, in his books of Divination, has spared nothing the most sacred at Rome. After he had smartly rallied those whom he disputed with on the extreme folly of consulting the entrails of beasts, he drives them at last to this answer: that the gods, who are almighty, change these entrails in the moment of the sacrifice, to the end that we should by them know their pleasure and futurity. It was the answer given by *Chrysippus*, by *Antipater*, and *Posidonius*, all great philosophers and chiefs of the party of the Stoics. ‘Ha! what say you?’ cries *Cicero*; there ‘are no old women so credulous as you are. Can you believe, says he, that the same calf has the liver in a good state, if chosen for

‘ the sacrifice by one, and an ill one, if chosen
‘ by another? Can this state of the liver be
‘ changed in an instant, to be accommodat-
‘ ed to the fortune of those that sacrifice? Do
‘ not you perceive that the victims are chosen by
‘ chance? Does not experience tell you so? for
‘ it often happens, that the entrails of one victim
‘ denote something that is fatal, and that those
‘ of another victim, which is offered up immedi-
‘ ately after, portend events most happy. What
‘ then becomes of the menaces of the first entrails?
‘ or how are the gods so soon appeased? But you
‘ will say, that in an ox, which *Caesar* one day
‘ sacrificed, there was no heart; and that since
‘ this animal could not live without a heart;
‘ it must of necessity be that the heart vanished
‘ just in the moment of the sacrifice. Is it pos-
‘ sible that you should have sense enough to know
‘ that this ox could not live without a heart, and
‘ yet have not enough to perceive that this heart
‘ could not fly away in a moment, I know not
‘ whither?’ And a little after he adds; ‘ Believe
‘ me, you ruin all natural philosophy by defend-
‘ ing the art of the sooth-sayers; for on this hy-
‘ pothesis it is not the ordinary course of nature
‘ that gives birth and death to all things; and
‘ there are some bodies which come from nothing,
‘ and shall return to nothing. What naturalist
‘ ever held this opinion? which however must
‘ be that of the sooth-sayers.’

I quote this passage from *Cicero*, only to shew the extraordinary freedom with which he insulted the very religion which he himself professed. In

a thousand other places he shews no more favour to the sacred fowls, the flight of birds, and all the miracles with which the annals of the chief priests were stuffed.

Why did not they indict him for his impiety? why did not all the people abhor him? why did not all the colleges of the priests rise up against him? One would think that among the Pagans, religion was a mere practice, the speculation of which was very indifferent. Do as others do; but believe as you please. It is a very extravagant maxim, but the people, who were not aware of the impertinence of it, were content with it; and the wits submitted to it very willingly, because it did not cramp them.

We may see therefore that all the Pagan religion was more ceremony, in which the heart bore no share. The gods are angry, all their thunderbolts are ready to be discharged; how shall they be appeased? Must we repent of the crimes we have committed? Must we return into the paths of that natural justice which ought to be the rule of all men? Not at all; we need only take a calf of such a colour, cast at such a time, and cut the throat of it with such a knife, and this will pacify all the gods: nay, farther, you may laugh at the sacrifice, if you please, it will fare never the worse with you.

Probably the case was the same with the Oracles: though every one believed as he list, yet they consulted them. So great a force has cu-

from over the minds of men, that there is no need of reason to join with it.

C H A P. VIII.

That other men besides Philosophers have had little esteem for Oracles.

WE read of abundance of Oracles in history, which were either despised by those that received them, or modelled to their fancy*. *Pactias*, a Lydian, and subject of the Persians, being fled for refuge to Cumae, a Greek town, the Persians sent to have him delivered up; the Cumaeans presently consulted the Oracles of the Branchides, to know what they ought to do with him; the Oracle answered, that they should deliver up *Pactias*. *Aristodicus*, one of the principal Cumaeans, who was not for it, had so much credit as to obtain a second message to the Oracle, and caused himself to be made one of the deputies; but the Oracle returned the same answer as before. *Aristodicus*, dissatisfied with this, took it into his head as he was walking about the temple to fright away some little birds which were building their nests there; whereupon he presently heard a voice from the sanctuary, crying, ‘De-
‘testable mortal, how dare you fright from this
‘place those who are under my protection?
‘And why then, great god, replied *Aristodicus*,
‘very quick, do you order us to expel *Pactias*,

* *Herodot.* Book the first.

‘ who is under ours? Verily, answered the god,
 ‘ I order it, to the end that you who are an im-
 ‘ pious people may be the sooner destroyed; and
 ‘ that you may come no more to trouble Oracles
 ‘ with your affairs.’ It seems that the god was
 pressed home, since he had recourse to railing;
 but it appears also that *Aristodicus* had not a ve-
 ry strong belief that it was a god who gave these
 Oracles, because he thought to entrap him by the
 comparifon of the birds; and after he had really
 caught him in a snare, it is likely that he believed
 him less a god than he did before. The Cume-
 ans themselves were not much persuaded of his
 being a deity, since they believed a second depu-
 tation might obtain a contrary answer; or at least
 he would think better of what he had to say next.
 By the way I observe that *Aristodicus*, when he
 laid his snare for the god, must have foreseen
 that they would not let him fright away the birds
 from so holy a sanctuary without saying some-
 thing to him; and that the priests were extreme-
 ly jealous of the honour of their temples.

The people of Ægina ‡ had ravaged the coast
 of Attica, and the Athenians prepared for an ex-
 pedition against them; at which time there came
 an Oracle to them from Delphos, threatening
 them with utter ruin in case they made war with
 those of Ægina, within the compass of thirty
 years; but when those thirty years were past,
 they were only to build a temple to Æacus, and
 to undertake the war, and then all things would

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‡ Herodot. Lib. 5.

succeed well. The Athenians, who burnt with a desire of revenge, compounded with the Oracle for one half, and complied with that part of it only, relating to the temple of Æacus, which they built out of hand; but as to the thirty years, they slighted that, and applied themselves immediately to attack the Ægeineans, and obtained all the advantages imaginable. This was not a single person, who had so little regard for the authority of Oracles, but a whole commonwealth, and that a very superstitious one.

It is not very easy to say what kind of regard the Pagans had for their religion: indeed we observed a little while ago, that they contented themselves with the submission of their philosophers to the ceremonies; but this was not altogether true. I am not certain, that *Socrates* refused to offer incense to the gods, or that he did not act the same part as other people at the public festivals; but this I am sure of, that the people prosecuted him for his particular sentiments in religion, though they could only guess at them; for he never openly explained himself. The people knew well enough what was taught publicly in the schools of philosophy; how then could they suffer so many opinions, contrary to the established worship, and often even to the existence of the gods, to be there publicly maintained? At least they knew perfectly well, what was played upon the theatres; for those representations were made for them; and surely the gods were never treated with less respect, than in the comedies of *Aristophanes*. *Mercury* in *Plutus* com-

plains that sight was restored to the god of riches, who had before been blind, and that *Plutus* now beginning equally to favour all the world, the other gods, to whom people no longer made sacrifices to obtain wealth, were starved for hunger: *Mercury* carries the humour on so far, as to look out for some sort of employment in a citizen's house, that he might have wherewithal to eat. The birds of *Aristophanes* are also very bold. All the comedy turns upon this, that a certain city of birds, which was designed to be built in the air, would interrupt the correspondence between the gods and men, render the birds ingrossers of the whole, reduce the gods to the utmost misery. I leave you to judge, if this be not all mighty devout. Yet this was the same *Aristophanes*, who endeavoured to excite the populace against the pretended impiety of *Socrates*: there is something very unaccountable that is often found in the affairs of this world. It is evident by these examples, and might be made more so by numberless others, if it were necessary, that the people were sometimes in a humour to hear jokes cast on their religion: they performed its ceremonies only to free themselves from those inconveniencies which might have attended the neglect of them; but it is evident, that in the main they had not much faith in them: and they had just the same respect for Oracles; for, most commonly, they consulted them, that they might have no more occasion to consult them; and if the answers were not accommodated to their designs, they did not much trouble themselves to

obey them ; so that perhaps, it was not a clear point even among the common people, that Oracles were delivered by a divine power.

After all this, it would be unnecessary to mention the histories of those great captains, who thought it no crime to despise both Oracles and auguries. And it is remarkable, that they were contemned even in the first ages of the Roman commonwealth, in those times of happy ignorance, when men were so scrupulously bigotted to religion, and when (as *Titus Livius* says in a place I am going to quote) philosophy, which taught men to despise the gods, was not yet known.

Papirius * made war with the Samnites, and at that time the Roman army longed to come to a battle. The sacred chickens, forsooth, must be first consulted ; but the eagerness to fight was so general, that though the chickens eat nothing at all, when they were put out of the coop, yet they, who were appointed to observe the Augury, reported to the Consul, that they had fed very well : upon this, the Consul promised his soldiers both a battle and victory. Mean time there arose a great contest amongst the keepers of the chickens, about the false report that had been made of the Augury. When *Papirius* heard it, he said, that, for his part, he had received a favourable Augury, and that he would abide by it ; that if what had been told him was false, they who took the Augury were to answer for it, and that

* *Liv.* lib. 29.

all the evil would fall upon their heads. Immediately therefore he ordered that those wretches should be placed in the front of the battle; and before the signal for it was given, an arrow, from what quiver none knew, pierced the keeper who had given a false report of the Augury. As soon as the Consul heard this news, he cried out aloud, '—The gods are here present: the criminal is punished: they have discharged all their anger on him, who deserved it, and we have now all the reason in the world to hope the best.' Then immediately he caused the signal to be given, and gained an entire victory over the Samnites.

It is very apparent, that the gods had a less share than *Papirius* in the death of this poor keeper; and that the general had a design, by his death, to encourage the soldiers, whom the false report of the Augury might have terrified; for the Romans were already acquainted with the tricks of this kind, in the time of their greatest simplicity.

It must be confessed then, that we should be much in the wrong if we believe either the Auguries or the Oracles more marvellous than the Pagans themselves did. And if we do then not think as meanly of them as some philosophers, and some generals of the army, did, yet let us at least have such thoughts of them, as the people themselves sometimes had.

But some may object, did all the Pagans despise the Oracles? No surely. And because some particular persons had no regard for them, is that

sufficient intirely to discredit them? To the authority of those who did not believe them, we need only oppose the authority of those that did.

But it may be answered, that these two authorities are not of equal weight. The testimony of those, who believe a thing that is already established, contributes not to the support of it; but the testimony of those, who do not believe it, is of force enough to destroy it; for they, who believe a thing, may perhaps not know the reasons that may be given against the belief of it; but those who do not believe it, cannot chuse but know, why others believe it.

It is quite contrary, when a point is established; for in that case, the testimony of those that believe it carries more weight with it, than the testimony of those who do not believe it; for it is natural to suppose, that they who believe it, must needs have examined it; and they who do not believe it, may not have considered it.

I will not say, that either in the one or the other case, the authority of those who believe, or believe not, is decisive; all that I would say is, that unless regard be had to the arguments of the two parties, sometimes the authority of one will be preferable, and sometimes that of the other. For in the general, when a man quits a common opinion, or receives a new one, he must make some use of his reason, whether it be good or bad; but there is no need of his making any use of it to reject a new opinion, or to adopt one that is already common; for there is need of

strength to resist a torrent, but to swim with the stream is easy.

It avails not to the credit of Oracles, that among those who believed something in them divine and supernatural, there were certain Philosophers of great reputation, such as the Stoics; for when philosophers are once prepossessed with any thing, they are more convincible than the common people, because they are alike blinded with the prepossession, and the false reasons, with which they support it. The Stoics in particular, as proud a sect as they were, held some opinions for which they deserve pity. How could they chuse but believe Oracles, who believed dreams? The great *Chrysippus* left no articles out of his creed, which would not have been equally believed by the most silly wench in life.

CHAP. IX.

That the ancient Christians themselves did not verily firmly believe that Oracles were delivered by Daemons.

ALTHOUGH it appears that the learned Christians in the first ages were fond enough of asserting that Oracles were delivered by Daemons, yet they often reproached the Heathens with being imposed upon by their priests: the thing must have been very true, since they asserted it, though this system of Daemons, which they esteemed so favourable to them, should suffer by it.

Thus *Clement Alexandrinus* speaks in his third book of Tapistries :

‘ Boast as much as you will, of your foolish
‘ impertinent Oracles, those of *Claros*, of *Apollo*
‘ the Pythian, of *Didymus*, of *Amphiaraus*, and
‘ of *Amphilocus*. You may even add your Au-
‘ gurs, and interpreters of dreams and prodigies.
‘ Shew us in the presence of *Apollo* the Pythian,
‘ those men who divined by meal, or by barley,
‘ and those who have been so esteemed, because
‘ they spoke in their bellies. Let the secrets of
‘ the Ægyptian temples, and the necromancers
‘ of the Heturians remain still in darkness, for
‘ they are certainly nothing but extravagant im-
‘ postures and mere cheats, as bad as dice-play-
‘ ing. The goats which are kept for divinati-
‘ on, and the ravens which are taught to utter
‘ Oracles, are, as one may say, but associates
‘ with these jugglers, who cozen all mankind.’

Eusebius, in the beginning of his fourth book of his Evangelical Preparation, proposes at large the best reasons in the world to prove, that Oracles could be no other than impostures: and those very arguments only I propose to be my basis hereafter, when I come to treat of the cheats of Oracles in particular.

Nevertheless, I must confess, that though *Eusebius* knew so very well how to prove that Oracles could not be supernatural, yet he attributes them to Daemons; and the authority of a man so well informed of the reasons on both sides, seems to be a very great encouragement to the party which he embraces.

But pray observe, that after *Eusebius* had very well proved, that Oracles could be no other than the impostures of priests, he assures (without either destroying or weakening those first proofs) that for all this, they were generally delivered by Daemons. But he ought to have quoted some unsuspected Oracle, which had been delivered in such circumstances, that although many others might be imputed to the artifices of priests, yet that could not. But *Eusebius* has done no such thing. This is, as if he should say, I clearly see, that all the Oracles can be no other than cheats; but yet I am not willing to believe them to be so; why? because it serves my purpose, that the Daemons should now and then enter into an Oracle. This is a very lamentable kind of reasoning. But, if *Eusebius* (in the circumstances of the times he lived in) durst not have said openly, that Oracles were not the works of Daemons, but in seeming to maintain that they were so, he had insinuated the contrary as artfully as possible, the case would have been different.

We are at liberty to guess either one or other, according to the esteem we have of *Eusebius*: for my own part, I believe clearly, that he asserted the oracular Daemons at random, or from a respect which he affected to have for the common opinion.

There is a passage of *Origen*, in his seventh book against *Celsus*, which sufficiently proves that he attributed Oracles to Daemons, only in conformity to the times, and to the then state of the

great dispute between the Christians and the Pagans. 'I might, said he, make use of the authority of *Aristotle*, and the Peripatetics, to render the Pythian Oracle very much suspected: 'I could, from the writings of *Epicurus*, and his sectaries, pick out a great many things that would discredit Oracles; and I could easily make it appear, that the Greeks themselves made no great account of them; but granting that they were not fictions, nor impostures, let us examine the case a little more closely, and consider, whether there were any necessity, that a deity should have any concern in them, and if it were not more reasonable to believe, that they were directed by evil Daemons and Genii, enemies to mankind.'

It is sufficiently evident, that *Origen* must naturally believe of Oracles, as we do; but the Pagans, who produced them for a proof of the divinity of their religion, were far from allowing that they were the artifices of their priests: so that to gain a little upon the Pagans, there was a necessity of giving up to them what they maintained with so much obstinacy, and to let them see, that though there might be something of supernatural in the Oracles, yet there was no reason to conclude, that a real divinity was concerned in them; and then Daemons were necessarily brought upon the stage.

It is true, that, absolutely speaking, it had been much better wholly to have excluded the Daemons from Oracles; and that by this means a greater blow would have been given to the Pagan

religion. But all the world perhaps did not enter so deep into this matter, and it was thought sufficient when by the hypothesis of Daemons, which solved the whole business in two words, the credit of all those miracles, which the Pagans could allege for their false worship, was defeated.

This, it is probable, was the cause, why, in the first ages of the church, men so generally embraced this opinion concerning Oracles. We see clearly enough into the darkness of remote antiquity, to discover, that Christians did not hold this opinion so much for the sake of truth, which they found in it, as for the advantages which it gave them in their disputes against Paganism: and could they be born again in the age wherein we live, I doubt not, but that being delivered, as we are, from those strange notions that determined them to be of that opinion, they would almost all of them have thought as we do.

Hitherto, we have only removed the prejudices that are contrary to our opinion, and which are derived either from the system of the Christian religion, or from philosophy, or from the general consent of both Pagans and Christians. We have answered all this, not by acting merely on the defence, but oftener by attacking; and now we shall make our assault with still greater vigour, and demonstrate, by all the particular circumstances which may be noted in the Oracles, that they never deserved to have been attributed to Daemons or the Genii.

CHAP. X.

Of Oracles corrupted, or bribed.

IT was so easy a matter to corrupt these Oracles, that it was very evident that they were managed by men. The Pythian priestess was called *Philippise* by *Demosthenes*, when he was complaining that the Oracles of Delphos were always conformable to the interest of *Philip*.

When *Cleomenes* *, king of Sparta, had a mind to depose *Demaratus* the former king, on pretence that he was not the son of *Ariston* his predecessor, and when *Ariston* himself complained that his son was born a little too soon after his marriage, the Oracle was consulted on so difficult a question ; and indeed the thing was of such a nature, that it could be decided only by the gods. But *Cleomenes* himself went beforehand to the chief priestess of Delphos, and she declared that *Demaratus* was not the son of *Ariston*. The cheat was some time after discovered, and the priestess deprived of her dignity ; for they were bound to revenge this dishonour done to the Oracle, and to repair its lost credit.

† During the time that *Hippias* was tyrant of Athens, some citizens, whom he had banished, obtained of the Pythian priestess by a bribe of money, that when the Lacedaemonians should come to consult her, no matter on what affairs,

* Herod. Lib. 6.

† Herod. Lib. 5.

the should always tell them, they must deliver Athens from tyranny. And the Lacedaemonians, to whom the same thing was always repeated, whatever they came about, believed at last, that the gods would never pardon them, for the contempt of orders so often repeated, and thereupon took up arms against *Hippias*, though he was their ally.

As the Daemons delivered Oracles, they never failed in complaisance to those princes that were become formidable; and it is to be noted that *Hell* had a very great regard for *Alexander* and *Augustus*. Some historians tell us plainly that *Alexander* had a mind, by his absolute authority, to make himself the son of *Jupiter Ammon*, both to gratify his own vanity, and for the honour of his mother, who was suspected to have had a gallant not so considerable as *Jupiter*; and they add, that before he went to the temple, he caused the god to be advertised of his inclination, and that the god very graciously complied with it. Other authors hold, that this was the contrivance of the priests themselves to please *Alexander*. There is none but *Plutarch* that grounds this divinity of *Alexander* on a mistake of the priest of *Ammon*, who saluting this king, and intending to say to him in Greek, *O my son*, pronounced a σ for a ν , (for he was a Lybian, and knew not well how to pronounce the Greek;) which words, with this change, signify, *Oh son of Jupiter* *. The whole court failed not to

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* $\nu \Omega \pi \alpha \iota \delta \iota \sigma$ for $\sigma \Omega \pi \alpha \iota \delta \iota \sigma$,

turn this mistake of the priest to the advantage of *Alexander*; and without doubt the priest himself made is pass for an inspiration of the god who had directed his tongue, and confirmed his bad pronounciation by Oracles. The last manner of relating this story is perhaps the best; for great things are easily deduced from small beginnings.

† *Augustus* was so much in love with *Livia*, that he took her by force from her husband, big with child as she was; and had not patience to stay for her delivery before he married her. The action being something extraordinary, the Oracle was consulted about it; which knew well how to make its court, and not only approved the marriage, but affirmed that weddings never succeeded better, than when the bride was already with child. This seems to me however a strange maxim.

There were at Sparta but two families, out of which they might chuse their kings. But *Lysander*, one of the greatest men that ever Sparta had, formed a design to take away this distinction, too advantageous for the two families, and too injurious to all the rest; and to open a way to the throne for all those who thought they had merit enough to pretend to it. In order to this, he contrived so perplexed a plan, that I admire how a man of sense could expect success from it. *Plutarch* says very well, that it was like a mathematical demonstration, to which no man arrives but by long circuits. There was a woman in

† Pruden.

Pontus who pretended to be big with child by *Apollo*; *Lyfander* cast his thoughts upon this child of *Apollo*, intending, if a son should be born, to make use of him (which shewed his views to be very extensive) and he caused a report to be spread, that the priests of Delphos had in their possession the antient Oracles, but were not permitted to read them, because *Apollo* had reserved that privilege for some one that should come of his blood, and repair to Delphos to have his birth recognized. The child of the woman at Pontus was to be this son of *Apollo*; and it was contrived, that amongst those mysterious Oracles, there was to be one found out, which should declare to the Spartans that they ought to give the crown to merit only, without any regard to families. Nothing remained now but to frame some Oracles; to bribe this son of *Apollo*, who was called *Silenus*, to make him come to Delphos, and to corrupt the priests. All this was done; which seems very surprizing to me; for what strange machines must have been made use of? *Silenus* was already in Greece, and prepared to go to make himself known at Delphos for the son of *Apollo*; but, as ill luck would have it, one of *Lyfander*'s creatures, having a terror upon him at last to find himself embarked in so delicate an affair, spoiled all.

There is scarce a more remarkable example to be found in all history of the corruption of the Oracles; but in reporting it, I will not conceal a truth that my author says nothing of; which is, that *Lyfander* had before endeavoured to corrupt many other Oracles, but could not accom-

plish it. *Dodona* refused to take his money, *Jupiter Ammon* was inflexible, and even the priests of the place sent deputies to *Sparta* to accuse *Lysander*; but by his interest he got clear of that affair. The great priestess of *Delphos* herself refused to sell him her voice. And this makes me still believe, that there were in *Delphos* two colleges, which held no communication with one another, the one of priests, the other of priestesses; for *Lysander*, though he could not corrupt the great priestess, bribed the priests effectually. The priestesses were those only who delivered the Oracles, *viva voce*, and acted on the *Tripos* like furies; but in all probability the priests had a record office of written prophecies, of which they were the masters, the dispensers, and the interpreters.

It is not to be doubted, but that the priests, for the honour of their function, were scrupulous sometimes to those who offered to bribe them, especially when things were required of them wherein there was no room to hope for much success; such as was the innovation which *Lysander* had a design to introduce into the government of *Sparta*; and perhaps the faction of *Agésilans*, which was then against that of *Lysander*, was somewhat jealous of his project, and had been before-hand with the Oracles. Was it to be imagined, that the priests of *Ammon* would have taken the pains to have come from the farthest part of *Libya* to *Sparta*, to prosecute such a man as *Lysander*, if there had not been a good understanding between

them and his enemies, and if the latter had not pushed them upon it?

C H A P. XI.

Of the establishment of new Oracles.

THE new Oracles, which were sometimes erected, did as much weaken the hypothesis of Daemons, as the old Oracles that were corrupted.

After the death of *Ephaestion*, *Alexander*, to comfort himself, would needs have it, that *Ephaestion* should be deified: to which all his courtiers consented, without any difficulty: and immediately temples were erected in many cities to *Ephaestion*, festivals were instituted to his honour, sacrifices were made to him, miraculous cures ascribed to him, and, in fine, that nothing at all might be wanting, they made him the pronouncer of Oracles. *Lucian* says, that *Alexander*, who was at first astonished to see the divinity of *Ephaestion* pass so well, believed it himself at length to be true, and hugged himself with the thought that he was not only a god, but that he had also the power of making gods.

Adrian committed the same folly for the love of young *Antinous*: in honour of his memory he built the city of *Andrinopolis*, and he consecrated temples and prophets to him, says *St. Jerome*: now, there were no prophets, but in those temples where there were Oracles. And there is yet remaining a Greek inscription to this sense:

TO ANTINOUS,

‘ The companion of the gods of Ægypt.
‘ M. *Ulpus Apollonius*, his prophet.’

After this, we need not wonder, that *Augustus* also delivered Oracles, as we find it in *Prudentius*: and certainly *Augustus* was as venerable as *Antinous* or *Ephaestion*, who, according to all likelihood, owed their divinity only to their beauty.

Without doubt, these new Oracles caused even those who were the least capable of thinking, to make reflections upon them. Was there not reason enough to believe, that these were of the same nature with the old ones? And to make a judgment of the origin of those of *Amphiaraus*, *Trophonius*, *Orpheus*, and of *Apollo* himself, was it not sufficient to mark the origin of those of *Ephaestion*, *Antinous*, and *Augustus*?

We do not find, however, that these were in like credit with the old ones; far from it.

These gods of the new creation were never applied to but when it was necessary for the complementing of princes; and for any thing else, they were not very seriously consulted: for when questions of importance were to be asked, they repaired to Delphos. The antient Tripodes had been in possession of futurity time out of mind; and the word of an experienced God was far more sure, than the declaration of such as were unexperienced.

The Roman emperors, whose interest it was to extol the divinity of their predecessors, since

they expected the same, would fain have rendered the Oracles of the deified Emperors, such as *Augustus* was, more celebrated ; but the people, accustomed to their old Oracles, could not have the same confidence in these ; nay, I am apt to believe, that what inclination soever they had to the most ridiculous superstitions, they laughed at these new Oracles, and in general at all the institutions of the new gods : for how could they possibly imagine the eagle, which flew out of the funeral pile of a Roman emperor, to be the soul of that emperor, taking its flight to heaven ?

How then came it to pass, that people were deceived at the first erection of gods and Oracles ? For this reason, as I conjecture. As for the gods, Paganism had only two principal sorts of them, viz. the gods who were supposed to be essentially of a divine nature, and the gods which were originally of a human nature. The former sort were declared gods by the wise men, or by the legislators with a multitude of mysteries ; and the people neither saw them then, nor ever before : The second sort, though they had been men in the view of the world, yet they were deified by the natural inclination of the people, in reverence of their good works. They framed to themselves a very exalted idea of the one, because they never saw them ; and of the other, because they loved them. But they could not have that devotion for a Roman emperor, who was made a god by order of the court, and not by the love of the people ; and who, besides this, was formerly a man, and known to be such by the world.

As for the Oracles, their first establishment is not more difficult to account for : find me but half a dozen persons, whom I can persuade that day-light is not owing to the sun, and I will not despair of whole nations embracing the same opinion : for, be an hypothesis ever so ridiculous, and it be but maintained for some time, it gains the character of antiquity, and is then sufficiently proved. There was on the top of Parnassus, a hole, out of which issued an exhalation, which made Goats dance, and got up into the head. Perhaps somebody, whose head was turned with it, fell a talking, without knowing what he said, and spoke some truth. Immediately there must be something divine fancied to be in this exhalation ; and that it contained the knowledge of futurity ; then they begin to approach this hole with veneration, and by little and little ceremonies are introduced.

Thus, in all probability, rose the Oracle of Delphos. And as it owed its origin to an exhalation, which affected the head, the Pythian priests could not help being in a fury for prophesying ; though in most of the other Oracles fury was not necessary.

Let an Oracle be once established, and you may guess a thousand will follow the example ; for, if the gods can speak in one place, why should they not do so as well in others ? The people struck with the marvellous of the thing, and impatient for the profit they expect from it, desire nothing more than to see Oracles set up every

every where; and, in time, all these Oracles get the character of being ancient, which stands them in great stead. The new ones had no such success, since they were established by Princes; whereas the people are more inclined to believe in what they make themselves.

Add to all this, that at the time of the first institution both of the Gods and the Oracles, there was much greater ignorance than afterwards. Philosophy was not yet known, and the most extravagant superstitions had met with no contradiction from thence. It is true, that those we call the vulgar are never mighty knowing; yet the ignorance which they were always noted for was not the same in every age. At least there are some ages wherein all mankind was the vulgar, and those times without comparison are the most favourable for the establishment of errors. It is no wonder then, that the people had a less esteem for the new Oracles, than for the ancient ones; but this makes not the old Oracles better or worse than the new ones. Either a Daemon went to lodge in the statue of *Hephaestion*, to deliver Oracles from thence, as soon as it pleased *Alexander* to erect one to *Hephaestion*, as to a god; or if the statue deliver Oracles without this Daemon, then that of *Apollo* the *Pythian* might do so as well. Now it would seem very strange and surprising, that a meer fancy of *Alexander* should alone be sufficient for putting a Daemon in possession of a statue, and thereby opening a perpetual source of error to all mankind.

C H A P. XII.

What places Oracles were established at.

WE shall now enter into the detail of the frauds practised by the priests; which includes many passages of ancient history that are very entertaining and extraordinary.

Countries that were mountainous, and by consequence full of holes and cavities, abounded most with Oracles. Such was *Baeotia*, which anciently, as *Plutarch* says, had a very great number of them. By the way it is to be noted that the Baeotians were reckoned the most silly people in the world; and therefore it was a fit country for Oracles, being full of dunces and caves.

I do not think that the first establishment of Oracles was a designed cheat; but the common people fell into a degree of superstition which gave room for men of brighter parts to make an advantage of it. For the stupidity of the common people is often such as could not have been foreseen; and sometimes they, who deceive them, think of nothing less, till they are even invited to impose upon them. And my opinion is, that Oracles were not at first placed in Baeotia, because it is mountainous; but that the Oracle of Delphos having been erected in Baeotia, after the manner we have related, the others, that were set up in imitation of it in the same country, were

placed also in caves: because the priests well knew how convenient they were for the purpose.

This custom afterwards spread itself almost every where; for the pretence of divine exhalations rendered caves necessary: and besides, caves of themselves seem to affect one with a certain horror, which promotes superstition. In things that are only contrived to make impressions on the imagination of men, nothing is to be neglected. Perhaps the situation of Delphos contributed to the reputation of its being a sacred town: It was built on a small level which was half way up the mountain of Parnassus, and encompassed with precipices that fortified it without the help of art. That part of the mountain, which was above it, had great resemblance of a theatre; and the exclamations of men, and the sound of the trumpets, were multiplied in the rocks. You must believe, that even the echoes were of use to them.

The convenience of the Priests, and the majesty of the Oracles, did therefore equally require caves; so that there were not so many prophetic temples in the flat country; and where there were such defects of situation, the priests knew well enough how to remedy it: for instead of natural caves they accommodated themselves with artificial ones, that is to say, what they called sanctuaries, which were a sort of caves, the particular residence of the divinity, and where none but the priests ever entered.

* When the Pythian priestess placed herself upon the tripods, it was in her sanctuary, an obscure place at some distance from a little room, wherein those stood who came to consult the Oracle. The entrance of this sanctuary was wholly covered with branches of laurel, by which means they who had the liberty of approaching it, could not possibly see what passed within.

From whence do you think proceeds the different account which the ancients give of the form of their Oracles? It is because they never saw what passed in the inside of their temples.

For example, they are not agreed about the Oracle of Dodona, and yet what should the Greeks have known better? *Aristotle*, (as *Suidas* reports) writes, that at Dodona there were two columns, upon one of which there was a basin of brass, and upon the other a statue of a child holding a whip, the lashes of which, being also of brass, made the basin rattle, when they were moved by the wind.

Demon (according to the same *Suidas*) says, that the Oracle of *Jupiter* at Dodona is all encompassed with basins, which, when any one is pushed against the next, the motion is communicated all round to the rest, and they make a din which continues for some time.

Others say, that it was a sounding Oak, which shook its branches and leaves when the Oracle was consulted; and which declared its answer by the priestesses called *Dodonides*.

* *Plutar.* Dial. Of Oracles that were ceased.

It is plain from all this, that there was nothing manifest but the noise, because it was heard without; but not seeing the inside of the place where the Oracle resided, they only knew what caused the noise by conjecture, and the fallacious reports of the priests. Yet history shews, that some persons had the privilege to enter into these sanctuaries; but they were men of no less quality than *Alexander* and *Vespasian*. *Strabo* reports from *Callisthenes*; that *Alexander* entered alone with the Priest into the sanctuary of *Ammon*, and that all the rest heard the Oracle only without doors.

Tacitus also relates, that *Vespasian* being at *Alexandria*, and having formed a design upon the empire, would needs consult the Oracle of *Serapis*; but that before he entered, he made every body quit the temple; and yet for all this, perhaps he did not enter into the Sanctuary. The instances of this privilege are therefore very rare; for my author avers that he never knew of any other than these two; unless you will add what *Tacitus* says of *Titus*, to whom the priest of the *Paphian Venus* would only discover in secret many great things, concerning the designs he had then in hand. But yet this example is not so good a proof as that of *Vespasian*, that the priests allowed great men the liberty of entering into the Sanctuary of their Temples. Doubtless they must have been men of great power to whom the priests could be prevailed on to discover their mysteries; but they did it only to princes, whose interest they knew it was to keep the secret; and

who, in the circumstances they were then in, had some particular reason to extol the Oracles.

In these dark sanctuaries all the machines of the priests were hid ; and they entered into them by paths under ground. *Rafinus* describes the temple of *Serapis* to us, as full of covered ways : and to bring a testimony stronger than his, do not the holy scriptures tell us how *Daniel* discovered the imposture of the priests of Bel, who had a private passage into his temple, to take away the viands there offered ? This single fact is enough, one would think, to decide the whole question in our favour ; for we there have an account of one of the miracles of Paganism, which was the most universally believed, how that the gods themselves took the pains to come and eat the victims. Do the scriptures attribute this prodigy to Daemons ? Not at all ; but to the juggling priests. This is the only place where the scriptures give any description of a Pagan miracle ; and though they do not tell us that the rest were not of the same nature, they give us plainly to understand that they were. After all, how much easier would it have been to persuade the people that the gods descended into statues to speak to them, and give them wholesome instructions, than that they came to eat the members of the goats and sheep ? and if the priests did really eat, instead of the gods, they might with much more reason pronounce the Oracles in their stead.

The vaults of the sanctuaries swelled the voice,

and caused rebounding echoes, which imprinted terror on all that heard it: you see also in all the poets that the Pythian priestess strained her voice to a loud pitch more than human. Perhaps too that sort of * trumpet which multiplies the sound, was not then altogether unknown: and it may be, Sir *Samuel Moreland* only revived a secret, which the Pagan priests knew before him; but chose rather to get profit by concealing it, than honour by divulging it. Father *Kirker* assures us, however, that *Alexander* had one of these trumpets, with which he made himself heard by his whole army at one sound.

One thing I will not omit, which, though but a trifle, serves to demonstrate how much the priests were addicted to cheating. † From the sanctuary, or inside of the temples, there came out sometimes a very agreeable vapour, which filled all the place where the consulters were: It was the arrival of the god, you must know, that perfumed all. Judge then, if men, who carried on their impostures so curiously as to descend to these minute circumstances, would neglect any thing essential.

* Sir *Samuel Moreland's* speaking trumpet.

† *Plutarch's* Dialogue of Oracles.

C H A P. XIII.

Of the distinction of days, and other mysteries of Oracles.

THE priests neglected no kind of precaution; and therefore they appointed certain days on which no man was permitted to consult the Oracle. This had a mysterious air, which goes a great way in such matters; but the chief advantage which they reaped from it, was, that they could put you off with this pretext till another time, if they had no mind to give you any answer; or that during this time of silence they took their measures and made their preparations.

On occasion of these pretended inauspicious days, there was delivered to *Alexander* one of the pleasantest Oracles that ever was. He went to Delphos to consult the god; when the priestess, pretending that it was not a proper time for it, would not enter into the Temple. *Alexander*, who was very rough, took her by the arm to lead her in by force; whereupon she cried out, ‘Ah my son, you are not to be resisted. I desire no more (says *Alexander*) this Oracle is enough for me.

But the Priests had another secret to gain time when they pleased. Before the Oracle was consulted, there was a necessity of sacrificing; and if

the entrails of the victims were not lucky, the God was not yet in a humour to answer. Who should be the judges of those entrails but the priests, who, as it appears by many examples, were commonly alone too when they examined them? And they often demanded a new sacrifice, though the animal already offered had the best heart and liver that could be wished.

What were called the mysteries and secret ceremonies of a God, were, without doubt, one of the best artifices the Priests could have invented for their security: and yet they could not so well hide their juggle, but that the cheat was suspected by many persons; and therefore they contrived among themselves to establish certain mysteries, which engaged those that were initiated into them, to inviolable secrecy.

It is true, there were such mysteries in those Temples where there were no Oracles; but many of the Oracle Temples had them: as for instance that of Delphos. *Plutarch*, in the Dialogue so often quoted, says, that there was no person in Delphos, nor in all that country, that was not initiated into the mysteries; so that all had a dependance on the Priests; and if any one had dared to have opened his mouth against them, he would have been branded for an Atheist, and a wicked man; and involved in troubles which he could never have got quit of.

If there had been no such mysteries, the inhabitants of Delphos would have been always obliged to have concealed the knavery of their

Priests; for Delphos was a City which had no other revenue but that of its Temple, and subsisted only by its Oracles; but the Priests secured the people to themselves still more, by the double tie of superstition and interest. If a man had given the Oracles an ill name, in such a town, he would have had a fine time of it!

They who were initiated into their mysteries, gave security for their discretion; for they were obliged to make a confession to their Priests of all the most private actions of their lives: and then the poor novices became petitioners to their Priests to keep them secret.

But a Lacedaemonian, who was going to be initiated into the mysteries of *Samothrace*, said bluntly to the Priests: 'If I have committed any crimes, surely the Gods are not ignorant of them.'

Another reasoned much in the same manner: 'Is it to You, or to God, we ought to confess our crimes?' 'It is to God,' says the priest. 'Well then, retire,' said the Lacedaemonian, 'and I'll confess them to God.' These Lacedaemonians were not extremely devout. But might not there have been some man wicked enough to make a sham confession, for the sake of being initiated into their mysteries, and then discover all the folly of them, and expose the imposture of the priests?

I believe that this misfortune might have happened, and that the priests used all possible means to prevent it: they plainly saw with whom they

had to do; and, I will warrant you, the two Lacedaemonians, whom we have mentioned, were not admitted. Besides, they had declared the Epicureans incapable of being initiated into the mysteries, because they were men who made it their business to ridicule them; and I do not believe they ever delivered out Oracles to them: nor was it very difficult to discover them; for all the Greeks, who applied themselves ever so little to literature, made choice of some sect of Philosophy, and took a surname from that sect, almost like that which we assume from an estate. For example, there were three *Demetriuses* thus distinguished; viz. *Demetrius* the Cynic, *Demetrius* the Stoic, and *Demetrius* the Peripatetic.

The custom of excluding the Epicureans from all mysteries, was so general, and so necessary for the security of things sacred, that it was made use of by that grand impostor, whose life *Lucian* describes so agreeably; I mean that *Alexander*, who imposed upon the Greeks so long with his serpents: he also added the Christians to the Epicureans; for he thought one no better than the other: and before he began his ceremonies, he always cried, Let the Christians be turned out. To whom the people answered, in a kind of chorus, Let the Epicureans be put out also. Nay, he did far worse than all this; for seeing himself tormented by these two sorts of people, who tho' pushed by different interests, yet conspired to turn his ceremonies into ridicule, he declared that *Pontus*, where he then lived, was full of wicked peo-

ple; and that the god, whose prophet he was, would speak no more, if they were not turned out of it; and upon this he fell foul upon the Epicureans and the Christians too.

The *Apollo* of Daphne, in the suburbs of Antioch, was under the same uneasiness, when in the time of Julian the apostate he answered all those who asked him the cause of his silence, that it was to be imputed to certain dead bodies interred in the neighbourhood. These were the bodies of christian martyrs, and particularly St. *Babilas*. Now it is the current opinion, that the presence of these bodies of the blessed deprived the Daemons of the power of speaking in the Oracle; but it is more probable, that the great concourse of christians to the sepulchres of these martyrs incommoded the Priests of *Apollo*, who did not care that such clear sighted enemies should be witnesses of their actions; and that they endeavoured by this false Oracle, to obtain of the Pagan Emperor, that he would cause the bodies, of which the god complained, to be cast out from thence.

But let us return to the artifices of the Priests, of which the Oracles were full: and to comprehend in one single reflection all that might be made upon them, let any one tell me, why the Daemons could not predict what was to come, unless they were in holes, in caves, and in obscure places? And why they did never animate a statue, in some cross-roads, exposed on all sides to the view of every body?

It

It may perhaps be said, that those Oracles which were given in answer to sealed letters, and those especially, that were delivered by dreams, could not have been without Daemons; but it will be very easy for us to shew, that they had nothing in them more marvellous than the rest.

C H A P. XIV.

Of Oracles that were delivered in answer to sealed letters.

THE Priests were not so scrupulous as to be afraid of unsealing the letters that were brought to them. They were to be laid first upon the altar; then the temple was shut; which the Priests knew very well how to enter, without being perceived. Or else, the letters were to be put into the hands of the Priests, that they might sleep upon them, and receive in a dream the answer, that was to be returned to them. And in both cases, they had leisure and liberty to open them privately. For the doing this, they had many secret arts, some of which we see practised by the false prophet of *Lucian*. And they are to be seen in *Lucian* himself, by any one that has the curiosity to know how the letters of the ancients were to be unsealed, without its being perceived.

Certainly, they made use of some of these secrets, to open the letter that the Governor of *Cilicia* (of whom *Plutarch* speaks) had sent to the

Oracle of *Mopsus*, which was at Malla, a city of that province. The Governor knew not what to think of the gods; for he was possessed by the Epicureans with many doubts, which they had put into his head: he resolved therefore, as *Plutarch* pleasantly observes, to send a spy among the deities, to learn what they were: so he gave him a letter very carefully sealed, to carry to the Oracle of Mopsus. This envoy slept in the temple, where he saw in a dream a comely man, who said to him, Black. He carried back this answer to the Governor; an answer which seemed very ridiculous to all the Epicureans of his court; but himself was struck with astonishment and wonder at it; and opening his letter before them, he shewed them what he had written; which was this question: ‘ Shall I sacrifice a white or a black ox to you?’ After this miracle, he was all his life very much devoted to the God Mopsus. We will hereafter discover to you the mystery of the dream; but it is sufficient at present to observe, that it is highly probable, that the letter was opened and skilfully sealed again. There was a necessity of carrying it to the temple; but if a Daemon was to make the answer, it was needless for the governor to send it.

If the Priests durst not venture to open the letters, then they endeavoured, by their cunning, to discover what men came to the Oracle about; for they were commonly persons of note, who had some favourite design or passion that was pretty well known abroad. And the priests had

so much conversation with them about the sacrifices, or by reason of the delays that were to be used, before the Oracle answered, that it was not difficult to draw from their own mouths, or at least to conjecture what was their errand: they made them offer one sacrifice after another, 'till they had got light into their affairs: they put them also into the hands of certain petty officers of the temple, who, under pretence of shewing them the antiquities, the statues, the paintings, and the offerings, found the art of making them blab out their business. These antiquaries, like those of that calling now in Italy, were in all the temples of any note. They had learnt by heart all the miracles that were performed there; they made a pompous display of the power and miracles of the God, and they told you a long story of every present that had been consecrated to him. And therefore, *Lucian* says very pleasantly, that all the men of this sort lived and subsisted only on fables; and that in Greece they would have been very sorry to have been told truths, though it had cost them nothing. If they who came to consult the Oracle did not tattle, were their servants silent? You must know, that in an Oracle-town, there were scarce any persons but Oracle-officers: some were Prophets and Priests; others poets, who put into verse the Oracles which were delivered in prose; others, meer Interpreters; others, little Sacrificers, who offered up the victims, and examined their intrails; others, sellers of per-

fumes and incense, or of beasts for the sacrifices; others antiquaries; and, in fine, others were but inn-keepers, whom the great resort of strangers enriched. Now all these people were in the interests of the Oracle and the God: and if by the means of the servants belonging to these strangers, they discovered any thing worth knowing, you need not doubt but they told the priests of it.

The pseudo-prophet, *Alexander*, who set up his Oracle in *Pontus*, had correspondents as far as Rome itself, who sent him an account of the most secret affairs of those who came to consult him.

By this means answers might be returned even without receiving letters. And such methods were doubtless settled by the priests of the *Apollo* of *Claros*, if it be true, that it was sufficient only to tell them the names of those that consulted them. *Tacitus* speaks thus of them in his second book of Annals: '*Germanicus* went to consult *Apollo* of *Claros*, where a woman does not deliver the Oracles as at *Delphos*; but a man chose out of certain families, and generally of *Miletus*; you need tell him only the number and names of them that come to consult him; and then he retires into a grotto, and having taken some water from a certain secret fountain there, he answers you in verse, to whatever you have in your thoughts, though often he is very ignorant.

Here we may observe, that the Oracle of Del-

phos was committed to the management of a woman, because she had nothing else to do there, but to act as if possessed with a devil; but because that of *Claros* had more difficulty in it, therefore a man only was to be intrusted with it. We may further remark, that the ignorance of the prophet, on which the marvellous of the Oracle does in great part depend, could not be very easily discovered; and that the Daemon of the Oracle, as much a Daemon as he was, could not dispense with the knowledge of the names of those who consulted him. But we are not come to that yet; it is sufficient to have shewn how they could answer, not only unsealed letters, but even private thoughts. It is true, they could not answer to the thoughts of every body, and what the priest of *Claros* did for *Germanicus*, he could not do for a meer citizen of Rome.

C H A P. XV.

Of Oracles delivered in dreams.

THE number of Oracles which were delivered in dreams is very great; for this way had more of the marvellous in it than any other, and yet was not very difficult in the practice. The most famous of all these Oracles was that of *Trophonius* in *Baeotia*. *Trophonius* was but a simple hero; but his Oracle was delivered with more ceremony than those of any God. *Pausanias*

himself, who had been to consult it, and who had passed through all its ceremonies, has left us a very ample description of it: and I believe, an exact abridgement of it will not be disagreeable to the reader.

Before any body descended into the den of *Trophonius*, they were obliged to pass a certain number of days in a little kind of chapel, called, 'The Chapel of good Fortune, and of the good Genius.' During this time they used expiations of all sorts; they abstained from hot bathings; they washed very often in the river *Hercynas*; they sacrificed to *Trophonius* and all his family, to *Apollo*, to *Jupiter* surnamed the king, to *Saturn*, to *Juno*, to an *European Ceres*, who had been nurse to *Trophonius*; and they lived only upon the flesh of the sacrifices, which probably was all that the Priests lived upon. The intrails of all these victims were to be examined, to see if *Trophonius* thought fit to admit them into his den; but if the omens had been ever so lucky, yet it would not do; for the decisive intrails were those of a certain Ram, which was to be sacrificed last; and if they were favourable, then the consulters were led in the night to the river *Hercynas*, where two children about thirteen or fourteen years old rubbed all their bodies over with oil; then they conducted them to the source of the river, and there they made them drink of two sorts of waters; those of *Lethe*, which obliterated all the prophane thoughts that before possessed them; and those of *Mnemosyne*,

which had the virtue to make them remember whatsoever they should see in the sacred den. After all these preparatives, they were shewed the statue of *Trophonius*, to which they made their prayers; and then they were covered with a linen vest, which was girt about them with certain sacred fillets, and at last they went to the Oracle.

The Oracle stood upon a mountain and was encompassed with a wall of white stones, upon which were erected obelisks of brass; within this circle was a cave, of the shape of an oven, cut out by the hand of man, whose entrance was so strait, that they did not descend into it by stairs, but by little ladders, and when they were come to the bottom, they found another little cave, whose entrance was also narrow: here they laid themselves flat on the ground, and took into each hand certain compositions of honey, which they were obliged to carry; then they put their feet within the opening of the little cave, and immediately perceived themselves pulled into it with very great force and agility.

There it was that things to come were declared; but not to all in the same manner; for some saw, others only heard. After this they came out of the den, creeping on the ground as they entered in, with their feet foremost. Immediately they were put into the chair of *Mnemosyne*, where they were asked what they had seen or heard? Thence they were led back into the Chapel of the good Genius, being still quite amazed

and senseless; but recovering their senses by little and little, they began to be able to laugh; for till then the grandeur of the mysteries, and the divinity with which they were filled, had made them very grave; though, for my part, I think one may wonder how they could retain their gravity so long.

Pausanias tells us, that there never was but one man who entered into the den of *Trophonius*, and did not come out again: this was a certain spy that *Demetrius* sent thither, to see if there were any thing in that holy place worth the plundering. The body of this poor creature was afterwards found afar off from thence; for it had not been thrown out from the sacred hole of the den.

It is very easy for us to make reflections upon all this; for what leisure had not the priests, during all the different sacrifices they obliged men to make, to examine if they were qualified for entrance into this sacred den? for certainly *Trophonius* made choice of his men, and did not receive every body. How did all these washings, expiations, and night-walkings, and these passages into their narrow, dark caves, fill mens minds with superstition, dread, and fear? how many machines were set at work in those dark places? the story of *Demetrius's* spy assures us, that there was no security in the den for those who came not thither with honest intentions; and that besides the sacred passage into it, which was known to every body, there was a secret one, which was

known only to the priests. When men were drawn in by their feet, it was doubtless done by cords, which they were far from perceiving; for they could not put their hands to feel what it was that drew them, because they were embarrassed with those compositions of honey, which they were obliged not to let go. Perhaps too those caves were full of perfumes and odours, which disturbed the brain; and the waters of Lethe and Mnemosyne were also, it is probable, prepared for the same effect, to say nothing of the sights and the noises which they might be terrified withal. When they came out from thence quite distracted, they talked of what they had seen or heard to people, who, taking advantage of the disorder, collected what they pleased, changed it as they thought fitting, and, in fine, always interpreted it their own way.

Add to all this, that of those Oracles which were delivered by dreams, some required a preparation by fasting, as that of *Amphiarus* * in *Attica*; that if your dreams could not receive a probable interpretation, they made you sleep over again in the temple; that they never failed to fill your head with fancies fit to make you dream of gods and extraordinary things: and that, for the most part, they made you sleep upon the skins of the victims, which perhaps were rubbed with some drug, which had an effect on the brain.

But when the priests, sleeping upon the sealed letters, had themselves prophetic dreams, the

* *Philostratus*, lib. 2. *Life of Apollonius*.

matter is still more explicable. Indeed the care the Pagan priests took to hide their impostures was superfluous; for if men were credulous and stupid enough to content themselves with their dreams, and to give credit to them, there was no necessity of letting others dream: and the priests might have reserved this privilege to themselves alone, without any blame; for, considering what sort of people they were whom they had to do withal, it was doing them too much honour to cheat them with precaution and address.

Will you believe, that there was, in Achaia*, an Oracle of *Mercury*, which was delivered in this manner? After many ceremonies, they whispered the God in the ear, and asked him what question they pleased. Then they stopt their own ears with their hands, went out of the temple, and the first words heard after they were come out, were taken to be the answer of the god. But to the end that the priests might the more easily cause them to hear what they pleased, without being discovered, this Oracle was only pronounced in the night.

* *Pausanias.*

C H A P. XVI.

The Ambiguity of the Oracles.

ONE of the greatest secrets of the Oracles, and one of the things which plainly shews that they were managed by men, is the ambiguity of the answers, and the art that was used to accommodate them to all events that might happen.

* When *Alexander* fell sick on a sudden at Babylon, some of his principal courtiers went to pass a night in the temple of *Serapis*, to inquire of that god, if it were not proper for them to bring their king to him for a cure. The god answered, that it was better for him to remain where he was. *Serapis* judged rightly; for if he had advised the bringing *Alexander* to him, and he had died by the way, or in the temple itself, what would they not have said? But if the king recovered his health at Babylon, what a reputation it would have been to the Oracle! If he died, it might be said it was for his advantage to die after the conquests he could neither augment nor preserve. There was a necessity of adhering to the last construction, which did not fail to prove to the advantage of *Serapis*, as soon as *Alexander* was dead.

Macrobius says, that when *Trajan* had a de-

* *Arrian*. lib. 7.

sign of attacking the *Parthians*, he was desired to consult the Oracle of the city Heliopolis about it, to which he need only send a sealed letter. Now, though *Trajan* put no great confidence in Oracles, yet he sent a sealed letter thither, in which there was nothing written, and the answer was also a blank. *Trajan*, being now convinced of the divinity of Oracles, sends another sealed letter, in which he demands of the god, whether he should return to Rome, after he had finished the war he had undertaken? The god ordered a vine, which was one of the offerings of his temple, to be cut in pieces, and carried to *Trajan*. The event, says *Macrobius*, was quite conformable to the Oracle; for *Trajan* dying in this war, his bones, which were represented by the broken vine, were carried back to Rome.

All the world knew for certain that the emperor designed to make war with the *Parthians*, and that this was the only business about which he consulted the Oracle: and the Oracle was so cunning, as to return him an allegorical answer, and so general a one, that it could not fail of being true. For if *Trajan* had returned to Rome victorious, though wounded, or having lost a part of his soldiers; if he were overcome, and his army put to flight; if any division had happened in it, or any mutiny amongst the *Parthians*; if any had happened at Rome in the absence of the emperor; if the *Parthians* had been totally defeated, or only in part; or had been abandoned by any of their allies; this broken vine was wonderfully adapted

adapted to either of these different cases; and it had been unhappy indeed if one of them had not fallen out. Yet I believe the bones of the emperor that were carried to Rome, and by which they explained the Oracle, were for all that the only thing of which the Oracle had no thought.

This vine puts me in mind of a kind of Oracle that accommodated itself to every thing, an Oracle of which, as *Apuleius* tells us, the priests of the goddess of Syria were the inventors. They made two verses, the sense whereof was this :

*The oxen, yok'd together, cut the earth,
To make the fields produce a fruitful birth.*

Now there was no question, which they could not answer with these two verses. For, if they were consulted upon a marriage, it was the same thing, 'Oxen yoked together, and fruitful fields.' If they were consulted about the purchase of any land, there are oxen to till it, 'and fruitful fields.' If about a journey; 'the oxen are yoked together,' and quite ready to set out, 'and the fruitful fields' promised great gain. If one went to war, do not 'these oxen under the yoke' clearly signify, that you shall put your enemies under the yoke? Probably, this goddess of Syria did not love to talk much, and had found out the way to satisfy all questions with one single answer.

They, who received these ambiguous Oracles, took the pains very willingly to justify them, by

adapting the success to the prediction. And often, that which had but one sense in the intention of the pronouncer of the Oracle, was after the event found to have two. And the impostor could depend on those whom he cheated for saving his honour. Thus, when *Alexander*, the pseudo-prophet, was asked by *Rutilianus*, what preceptors he should provide for his son? he answered, that he should let him have *Pythagoras* and *Homer*. *Rutilianus* took it in the plain sense, that he should study philosophy and the Belles Lettres. The young man dying a few days after, they represented to *Rutilianus*, that his prophet was very much mistaken: but *Rutilianus* found out with very great subtilty that the death of his son was foretold by the Oracle, because it appointed *Pythagoras* and *Homer*, who were both dead, for his preceptors.

C H A P. XVII.

The cheats of the Oracles fully exposed.

IT is now needless to detect the cunning of the priests by arguments that might be thought too refined. The time has been when they were discovered to the eyes of the whole world, viz. when the Christian religion triumphed publicly over Paganism under the christian emperors

Theodoret says, that *Theophilus*, bishop of *Alexandria*, shewed the inhabitants of that town,

the hollow statues, into which the priests privately crept to deliver their Oracles.

When, by order of *Constantine*, the temple of *Æsculapius* at *Ægea* in Cilicia was pulled down, they chased thence, (says *Eusebius*, in the life of this emperor,) ‘not a God, nor a Daemon, but the cheat, that had so long imposed on the credulity of the people.’ He adds, in general, that in the demolished idols, they found no Gods at all, nor Daemons, nor so much as a melancholy shade, or obscure spectre, but only some hay, or straw, or ordure, or the bones of dead men. It is from him that we learn the story of *Theotechnus*, who consecrated in the city of Antioch a statue to *Jupiter*, god of friendship; which doubtless he contrived to deliver Oracles, since *Eusebius* says, that there were prophets belonging to this god. *Theotechnus* by this means got such credit, that *Maximin* made him governor of the whole province. But *Licinius* coming to Antioch, and suspecting the imposture, caused the priests and prophets of this new *Jupiter* to be put to the torture; whereupon they confessed all, and both they and their accomplices were put to death, their master *Theotechnus* suffering first. The same *Eusebius* in the fourth book of his Evangelical Preparation, says also, that in his time, the most famous prophets amongst the Pagans, and their most celebrated divines, of whom some were also magistrates of their cities, were compelled by torments to discover all the apparatus of the cheats of the Oracles. If we were now to

treat of what the old christians believed of them, all these passages of *Eusebius* would, in my opinion, decide the question. They admitted Daemons indeed in a certain general system, which served for their disputes; but when they came to a particular point of fact, they spoke little of them, or rather flatly rejected them.

I do not believe, that there can be better witnesses against the Daemons, than the Pagan priests themselves, and after what they have laid down, the thing seems to me to be clearly determined. I will only therefore add one chapter concerning Lots; not to discover the imposture of them, for that is comprehended in what we have already said of Oracles; and besides it is sufficiently apparent of itself; but that I may not omit a species of Oracles very famous in antiquity.

C H A P. XVIII.

Of the Lots.

LOT is the effect of chance, and, as it were, the decision, or the Oracle of fortune. But lots are the instruments made use of, to know what this decision is.

These lots for the most part were a kind of dice, whereon were ingraven certain characters, or words, the explication of which was to be sought for in tables made for that purpose. The manner of using these lots was various: in some

temples they cast them out of their hand, in others they were thrown out of an urn; from whence came this phrase so common with the Greeks, 'The lot is fallen.'

This throwing of the dice was always ushered in by sacrifices, and abundance of ceremonies. The priests, as it is probable, knew how to cog the dice; but if they would not take that pains, they need only let them run as they would, since they were always masters of the explanation.

* The Lacedaemonians went one day to consult the lots of *Dodona*, upon a war that they were undertaking; for besides the speaking oaks, the doves, the basons, and the Oracle, there were also lots at *Dodona*. After all the ceremonies were past, just as they were going to cast the lots, with a great deal of respect and veneration, a monkey of the king of the *Molossi*, being got into the temple, turned the urn and lots topsy-turvy; upon this the frightened priestesses told the Lacedaemonians, that they ought not to think of conquering, but only how to save themselves. And all writers say, that the Lacedaemonians never received a more unlucky presage.

The most famous lots of all were those of *Praeneste* and *Antium*, two little towns in Italy.

At *Praeneste* was *Fortune*, and at *Antium* were the *Fortunes*, which were statues that moved of themselves, (according to the testimony of

Macrobius book 1. chap. 23.) and whose different motions, either served for answers, or declared whether it was fitting to consult the lots, or not.

A passage in *Cicero's* second book of Divination, which tells us, that they consulted the lots of Praeneste, with the consent of Fortune, implies, that the statue of Fortune could move its head, or give some other sign of its intention.

We find also, that there were other statues, which had this very same faculty. *Diodorus Siculus* and *Quintus Curtius* say, that *Jupiter Hammon* was carried by fourscore priests in a kind of golden chair of state, to which hung cups of silver; that he was followed by a great number of women and maids, who sung hymns in the language of the country; and that this god, so carried by his priests, conducted them, by some motions, which way he would have them go.

The god of Heliopolis in Syria, according to *Macrobius*, did the same: all the difference was, that he would be carried by men of the best quality in the province, and such as had a long time lived in perfect continence, and had their heads shaved.

Lucian, in his treatise of the goddess of Syria, says, that he once saw an *Apollo* still more miraculous, who, being carried on the shoulders of his priests, took it in his head to leave them below on the earth, and to mount himself into the skies. And this, in the sight of such a man as *Lucian*, is of consequence.

But I am so tired with discovering the cheats of these Pagan priests, and am so convinced my reader is as weary of hearing it, that I will not spend any time in considering how it was that they made the puppets dance.

In the east, the Lots were arrows, and to this day the Turks and Arabians make use of them in the same manner. The prophet *Ezekiel* says, that *Nebuchadnezzar* mingled his arrows against Ammon and Jerusalem, and that the predicting arrow flew against Jerusalem; a fine way of deciding the question against which of the two nations he should make war.

In Greece and Italy, they often drew the lots from some famous poet, as *Homer* or *Euripides*: and what first presented itself at the opening of the book, was looked upon to be the decree of heaven. History furnishes us with a thousand examples of this kind.

It is also evident, that about two hundred years after the death of *Virgil*, they set a great value on his verses, and began to believe them prophetic, and to use them instead of the ancient lots of *Praeneste*. * *Alexander Severus*, as yet a private man, at a time when the emperor *Helio-gabalus* was not much his friend, received this answer in the temple of *Praeneste* out of *Virgil*,

———*Si qua fata aspera rumpas,
Tu Marcellus eris.*

* *Lampridius*.

*If you can vanquish destiny,
The great Marcellus you shall be.*

Here my author remembers, that *Rabelais* mentions the *Sortes Virgilianae*, Virgilian Lots, which *Panurgus* consulted on his marriage; and he judges that passage of the book as learned as it is agreeable and jocose. He says, that the trifles and follies of *Rabelais* are many times of more avail, than the most serious discourses of others. I would not forget this elogy, because it is a thing very singular to meet with, in the midst of a treatise of Oracles that is full of knowledge and erudition. It is certain that *Rabelais* had a great deal of wit and reading, and a particular art of treating learned things as trifles, and of relating silly stories without being tiresome to his reader. And it is a misfortune that he lived not in an age that would have obliged him to more chastity and politeness.

These lots were afterwards in use amongst Christians, who consulted the holy scriptures for that purpose, as the Pagans did their poets. St. *Augustin*, in his one hundred and nineteenth epistle to *Januarius*, seems not to disapprove it, unless it be done for some secular affair. *Gregory* of Tours tells us himself what his practice was: he passed several days in fasting and prayer; afterwards he went to the tomb of St. *Martin*, where he opened some book of the scripture as his fancy led him, and took the first passage which offer-

ed itself to his view for the answer of God; and if this passage made nothing for his purpose, then he opened the bible in another place.

Others took the first thing they heard sung when they entered into the church, for a divine lot.

But who would believe that the emperor * *Heraclius*, deliberating in what place he should winter his army, should determine it by this kind of lot? He purified his army for three days, and afterwards opened the book of the gospels, and there found that Albania was marked out for his winter quarters. Was that an affair of which a man could hope for a decision in the scriptures?

At last indeed the church has quite banished this superstition, but it took up a great deal of time first: for when once our minds are possessed with an error, it is long before it can be eradicated, if ever.

* *Cedrenus*.

The End of the first Dissertation.

THE

Second DISSERTATION.

*That the Oracles did not cease at the coming of
Jesus Christ.*

THE greatest difficulty that regards Oracles is now surmounted, since we have proved that Daemons were not at all concerned in them. And consequently, as Oracles signify so little to the Christian religion, it is not very material to prove whether they ceased precisely at the coming of *Jesus Christ*, or not.

C H A P. I.

The weakness of the arguments in support of the opinion, that the Oracles ceased at the coming of Jesus Christ.

THAT which induced most men to believe that the Oracles ceased at the coming of *Jesus Christ*, was the prediction by the Oracles themselves of their own silence; and the confession of the heathens, who about the time of *Jesus Christ* often declared that they were ceased.

We have already seen the imposture of those pretended Oracles, in which a Daemon that was struck dumb, said himself that he was dumb. These Oracles were either feigned by the too great zeal of the Christians, or too easily received by their credulity.

I will recite one of those Oracles, upon which *Eusebius* supports his opinion, that the birth of *Jesus Christ* silenced the Oracles. It is taken from *Porphyrius*; and *Eusebius* never fails of making all the advantage he can of the testimony of this enemy.

‘ I will declare to you the truth concerning
‘ the Oracles both of Delphos and Claros, (said
‘ *Apollo* to his priests.) In times past there came
‘ from the bosom of the earth an infinite number
‘ of Oracles and fountains, and exhalations, which
‘ inspired people with divine fury; but the earth,
‘ by the continual changes which time makes in

‘ it, has reimbibed into itself all those fountains,
‘ exhalations and Oracles: and there remains
‘ now no more but the waters of Mycale in the
‘ Didymean fields, and those of Claros, and the
‘ Oracle of Parnassus.

Upon this, *Eusebius* concludes in general that all Oracles were then ceased.

But it is certain that three of them at least are excepted, according to this Oracle which he reports himself: but he takes notice only of the first words that make for his purpose, and troubles not himself with the rest.

But does this Oracle of *Porphyrius* tell us when the other Oracles ceased? not at all; though *Eusebius* chuses to understand it to be at the coming of *Jesus Christ*. His zeal is laudable, but not his manner of arguing.

And suppose that *Porphyrius*’s Oracle did speak of the coming of *Jesus Christ*, it would follow that many Oracles then ceased, but that however some remained.

Eusebius perhaps imagined that this exception was of no moment, and that it was sufficient that the greatest part of the Oracles did then cease; but he is mistaken. If the Oracles had been delivered by Daemons, who by the birth of *Jesus Christ* were condemned to silence, then no Daemon would have been exempted, or privileged. If there was but one single Oracle remaining after the birth of *Jesus Christ*, I desire no farther proof that it was not his birth that imposed a silence upon the Oracles. This is one of those
cases,

cases, where the least exception overthrows the general proposition.

But perhaps it may be said, that though the Daemons did cease to deliver Oracles at the birth of *Jesus Christ*, yet Oracles continued still for all that, because the priests counterfeited them.

This would be a supposition without any foundation; for I can prove that Oracles continued four hundred years after the death of *Christ*; and no difference has been observed between those that were delivered after the birth of *Jesus*, and those that preceded it. And besides, if the priests could put the cheat upon people for the space of four hundred years, why could they not do it always?

Of all the Pagan authors who have most promoted the belief that Oracles ceased at the coming of *Jesus Christ*, *Plutarch* is the chief: he lived some hundred years after *Christ*, and wrote a dialogue upon the cessation of the Oracles. Many men, upon that single authority, have formed and fixed their opinion; and yet *Plutarch* positively excepts the Oracle of *Lebadia*, (that is to say, of *Trophonius*) and that of Delphos: where, as he says, there was antiently employment enough for two priests, and sometimes for three, but that in his days one served the turn.

But he confesses that the Oracles were decayed in Baeotia, a country which had formerly been a very fruitful source of them.

All this proves the cessation of some Oracles, and the diminution of others; but not the intire

cessation of all; which however there is an absolute necessity for those to prove, who maintain the common opinion.

The Oracle of Delphos was not however so mightily decayed in *Plutarch's* time; for he himself tells us in another treatise, that the temple of Delphos was then far more magnificent than ever; that the antient buildings, which time began to ruin, were repaired, and others added to them in the modern taste; that there was a small town near Delphos, which increased daily by little and little, and had its nourishment from that city, like a little tree that pushes out at the foot of a great one; and that this town was become more considerable than it had been for a thousand years past. But even in this dialogue, which treats of the cessation of Oracles, *Demetrius* the Cilician, one of the interlocutors, says, that before he began his voyage, the Oracles of *Amphilochus* and *Mopsus* in his country were as flourishing as ever; but that since he came from thence he knew not what might have happened to them.

Thus you have seen all that is to be found in this treatise of *Plutarch*; to which you are referred by so many men of learning for a proof that Oracles ceased at the coming of *Christ*.

Here my author pretends, that we are also fallen into a gross mistake, concerning a passage in the second book of *Divinations*, where *Cicero* ridicules the Oracle said to be delivered by *Apollo* in Latin to *Pyrrhus*, who consulted it concerning the war he was going to make against the

Romans. This Oracle had a double meaning, so that it could not be understood, whether *Pyrrhus* was to overcome the Romans, or the Romans to overcome *Pyrrhus*. The double entendre is so peculiar to the Latin phrase, that one cannot well render it into English; for my part, I can translate it no better than thus :

*I do pronounce that Rome
Pyrrhus shall overcome.*

The very words of *Cicero*, concerning this Oracle, are these that follow.

‘ In the first place, says he, *Apollo* never spoke Latin: Secondly, The Greeks knew nothing of this Oracle: Thirdly, *Apollo*, in the time of *Pyrrhus*, had left off rhiming. In fine, although the *Æacides*, from which family *Pyrrhus* was descended, were far from being men of a very refined genius, or of much penetration, yet the equivocation of the Oracle was so manifest, that *Pyrrhus* could not but perceive it. But what should be the reason that Oracles were delivered in such a manner at Delphos long ago, so that now-a-days nothing is more despised?

It is on these last words, the opinion is grounded, that Oracles were no longer delivered at Delphos in the time of *Cicero*.

But my author says, it is a mistaken notion, and that these words, ‘ What should be the reason that Oracles were delivered in such a manner,’

plainly shew, that *Cicero* speaks only of Oracles in verse; because he is treating of such a one in that place.

But I know not whether we ought to be altogether of my author's opinion; for immediately *Cicero* proceeds thus: 'When the defenders of
' Oracles are hard put to it here, they answer, that
' this virtue in the exhalation of the earth, which
' inspired the Pythian priestesses, with length of
' time is evaporated. One would think that they
' were talking of some wine that was grown flat;
' for what time can consume, or exhaust, a virtue
' all divine? And what can be more divine than
' an exhalation from the earth, which works such
' an effect upon the soul, as to give it both the
' knowledge of futurity, and the power to explain
' it in verse?'

It seems to me, that *Cicero* means that the virtue was intirely ceased: and he must have been sensible, that a good part of it remained, if Oracles were still delivered at Delphos, though but in prose. Will any man say, that a prophecy is nothing at all, unless it be in verse?

I do not think, that they are so mightily mistaken, who take this passage for a proof of the entire cessation of the Oracle of Delphos; but it is wrong to pretend to draw any argument from thence, for attributing this cessation to the birth of *Jesus Christ*. For the Oracle ceased too soon for that, since it appears, by this very passage, that it had ceased a long time before *Cicero*.

But, in truth, the fact is not as *Cicero* seems to

understand it in this place. For he himself, in his first book of Divination, makes his brother *Quintus*, who stands up for the Oracles, to speak in these terms: 'I insist upon this point, that the Oracle of Delphos had never been so famous, and had never received so many offerings from kings as well as people, if the truth of its predictions had not, at all times, been acknowledged. Now indeed it is not so famous: as this is owing to its predictions being not so true; so on the other hand, if they had not been once true in every respect, it would never have been famous to such a degree as it has been.'

But what is yet a stronger proof, *Cicero* himself (as *Plutarch* relates in his life) did in his youth consult the Oracle of Delphos, as to his future conduct in the world: and it was answered him, that he should follow his genius, rather than be governed by the vulgar opinions. Now if it were not true, that *Cicero* consulted the Oracle of Delphos, yet at least it must be granted, that it was consulted in *Cicero's* time.

C H A P. II.

Why the ancient authors contradicted one another often, as to the time of the cessation of Oracles.

HOW comes it to pass, it may be said, that in the fifth book of *Lucan's* *Pharsalia*, he speaks thus of the Oracle of Delphos? 'The Oracle of Delphos, which has been silent ever since great men dreaded a future state, and forbade the gods to speak, is the most considerable of all the favours of heaven, which our age has lost.' And a little after, '*Appius*, who was desirous to know the destiny of Italy, had the boldness to go and interrogate this cave, that has been so long mute; and to move this Tripod, that has been so long undisturbed.'

How comes it, that *Juvenal* says in a certain place, 'Since the Oracle at Delphos speaks no more?'

In fine, what should be the reason, that among the authors of one and the same age, we find some who say, the Oracle of Delphos speaks no more, and others who say, he speaks still? And whence comes it, that the same author sometimes contradicts himself upon this subject?

Surely the reason is, because Oracles were no longer in their antient reputation, nor yet were they absolutely ruined: so, that in comparison of

what they had formerly been they were nothing; but yet, for all that, they continued to be something still.

Besides, some Oracles were ruined for a while, and afterwards came into credit again; for the Oracles were subject to various accidents. They must not be supposed annihilated from the time of their being mute; for they might afterwards resume their speech.

Plutarch says, that in old time a Dragon, that came and lodged upon Parnassus, caused the Delphic Oracle to be deserted; and that it was commonly believed, that the solitude of the place tempted the Dragon thither; but that it was more probable, that the Dragon caused the solitude, Greece being filled with cities, *etc.*

You see that *Plutarch* speaks of a time very far back. Therefore the Oracle had since its erection been once abandoned, and we are sure that afterwards it was re-established to a wonderful degree.

But after this, the temple of Delphos suffered divers misfortunes. It was plundered by a robber descended from *Phlegias*, by the army of *Xerxes*, by the Phocenses, by *Pyrrhus*, by *Nero*; and, last of all, by the Christians under *Constantine*. All this, to be sure, was of no service to the Oracle, for the Priests were either massacred or dispersed, the place was abandoned, the sacred utensils were lost, and it must of necessity require great charges, care, and time, to put the Oracle in *statu quo*.

It is therefore possible, that *Cicero*, in his youth, consulted the Oracle of Delphos; that during the war between *Caesar* and *Pompey*, and in that general disorder of the universe, the Oracle was mute, as *Lucan* will have it; and, finally, that after the end of this war, when *Cicero* writ his books of philosophy, it might begin to be re-established so far, as to authorize *Quintus* to say, it was still in the world; and yet so little, as to justify *Cicero* in supposing that it was no longer in being.

When *Dorimachus*, as *Polybius* reports, burned the porticoes of the temple of Dodona, quite destroyed the sanctuary of the Oracle, and pillaged, or ruined all the offerings, an author of that time might very well have said, that the Oracle of Dodona spoke no more. But for all this, in the next age, another author might be found reporting an answer from it.

C H A P. III.

The history of the duration of the Oracle of Delphos, and some other Oracles.

WE cannot better prove, that about the time of the birth of *Jesus Christ*, when the silence of the Delphic Oracle was so much talked of, it did not altogether cease, but was only interrupted, than by setting down all the different times in which we find it has spoke since.

Suetonius, in the life of *Nero*, says, that the Oracle of Delphos warned him to have a care of seventy-three years; that therefore *Nero* believed, he should not die till that age, and never thought of old *Galba*, who, at the age of seventy three, took his empire from him. Mean while *Nero* thought himself so fortunate, that having lost things of a great value, in a shipwreck, he boasted that the fishes would bring them back to him.

But, certainly, *Nero* either received from the Oracle of Delphos some other answer that he thought less favourable to him, or was discontented that he was to live no longer than seventy-three years, when he took the Cirrhaean Fields from the priests of Delphos, to give them to his soldiers; stripped the temple of more than five hundred statues of men and gods, all of brass; and prophaned, or for ever abolished the Oracle, by causing mens throats to be cut at the very mouth of the sacred cave from whence the divine spirit issued.

That the Oracle, after such an insult on it as this, should be mute till the reign of *Domitian*, so that, as *Juvenal* says, it spoke no more, is not at all to be wondered at.

And yet it is impossible it could be altogether mute from the time of *Nero* to that of *Domitian*, by what *Philostratus* says in the life of *Apollonius Tyanaeus*, who saw *Domitian*: ‘*Apollonius* visited all the Oracles of Greece, that of Dodona, that of Delphos, that of Amphiaraus, etc.’ And in

another place he speaks yet farther: ' You may
' see *Apollo* of Delphos made illustrious by the
' Oracles which he delivers in the midst of
' Greece; he answers those who consult him, as
' you know very well, in few words, and with-
' out accompanying his answer with prodigies;
' although it were very easy for him to make
' *Parnassus* tremble, to stop the course of *Cephi-*
' *sus*, and to change the waters of *Castalia* into
' wine: he tells you the plain truth, and does
' not make a needless display of his power.' It is
very pleasant, that *Philostratus* should think of
enhancing the merit of his *Apollo*, because he was
no great worker of miracles. But probably some
poison was concealed in this passage against the
Christians.

We formerly observed, that, in the time of *Plu-*
tarch, who lived under *Trajan*, this Oracle was
yet in being, but reduced to one single Priest-
ess, though once it had two or three. Under *A-*
drian, *Dion Chrysostom* says, that he consulted the
Oracle of Delphos, and he relates one of its an-
swers, which seemed to him to be very intricate,
and really was so.

Under the Antonini, *Lucian* says, that a priest
of Tyana went and asked of the pseudo-prophet
Alexander, if the Oracles that were then deliver-
ed at Didymus, at Claros, and at Delphos, were
really the answers of *Apollo*, or impostures. *A-*
lexander having a regard for these Oracles, which
were so like his own, answered the priest, that it
was a secret not fit for him to know. But when

this artful priest demanded what he should be after his death, he was answered boldly, 'Thou shalt be a Camel, then a Horse, then a Philosopher, and at last a Prophet as great as *Alexander*'

After the *Antonini*, three emperors disputed for the empire, *Severus Septimus*, *Pescennius Niger*, and *Clodius Albinus*. 'Delphos was consulted, says *Spartianus*, to know which of the three would be best for the commonwealth; and the Oracle answered in verse, the black is the best; the African is good; the white is the worst.' By the Black was meant *Pescennius Niger*; by the African, *Severus*, who was of Africa; and by the White, *Clodius Albinus*. It was asked afterwards, 'Who should remain master of the empire?' and it was answered, 'The blood of the white and the black shall be spilt, and the African shall govern the world.' Then it was demanded, 'How long time shall he govern?' and it was answered, 'He shall ride on the sea of Italy with twenty ships, though with one ship he may cross the sea' By which it is meant, that *Severus* should reign twenty years. Here the Oracle reserved to itself an obscure meaning to have recourse to in case of necessity; but in short, when Delphos was in its most flourishing state, better Oracles were never delivered there than these.

We find nevertheless, that *Clemens Alexandrinus*, in his exhortation to the Gentiles, which he composed, either under *Severus*, or about that time,

says very plainly, that the fountain of *Castalia*, which belonged to the Oracle of Delphos, and that of Colophon, and all the other prophetic fountains, had at last, though late, lost their fabulous virtues.

Perhaps at that time, these Oracles were fallen into one of those states of silence, to which by intervals they were subject: or perhaps, because they were out of request, *Clemens Alexandrinus* thought fit to say, they were totally extinct.

It is certain however, that under *Constantius*, the father of *Constantine*, and during the youth of *Constantine*, Delphos was not yet ruined; since *Eusebius*, in the life of *Constantine*, makes him say, there was then a report, that *Apollo* had delivered an Oracle, not by the mouth of a priestess, but from the bottom of his obscure cave, which said——‘ That the just men, who were
‘ upon earth, were the cause, that he could no
‘ longer speak truth.’ A very pleasant confession this! Besides the Oracle of Delphos must then necessarily be in a very miserable state, since it could not maintain one priestess.

It received a terrible blow under *Constantine*, who commanded, or else suffered, Delphos to be pillaged. ‘ Then, says *Eusebius* in the life of *Constantine*, they produced to the view of all the
‘ people in the squares of Constantinople, those
‘ statues, which, through the error of men, had
‘ been so long the objects of veneration and worship: *Apollo* the *Pythian*, *Sminthius*, the *Tri-*
‘ *podes* in the *Circus*, and the *Heliconian* muses
‘ in

in the palace, were all exposed to the railleries of mankind.

The Oracle of Delphos, however, came into credit once again; for the emperor *Julian* * sent to consult it about the expedition that he intended against the Persians. If the Oracle of Delphos did continue longer, we cannot however extend its history farther: there is no more mention of it in any author; but it is very likely, that was the very time when it ceased, and that its last words were addressed to the emperor *Julian*, who was so zealous for Paganism. I do not therefore well understand, how some great men could put *Augustus* in the place of *Julian*, and boldly affirm, that the Oracle of Delphos ended with the answer it delivered to *Augustus* concerning the *Hebrew Infant*. Some modern authors †, who thought this Oracle worthy of a *glorious exit*, answerable to the great figure it made in the world, have contrived such a one for it. They read in *Sozomenus* and *Theodoret*, that, in the time of *Julian*, the temple of *Apollo*, which was in the suburbs of *Antioch* called *Daphne*, was set on fire, and that no body could discover the author or cause of it; so that the Pagans accused the christians of it, and the christians attributed it to lightening darted by the hand of God. *Theodoret* indeed says, that a thunderbolt fell upon this temple; but *Sozomenus* says nothing at all

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* *Theodoret. Pencer.*

† *Melancthon, Boissard, Hospin.*

of it. Now, these modern authors had a mind to transplant this accident to the temple of Delphos, which was very far from thence; and accordingly they write, that by the just vengeance of God, it was destroyed by lightening, accompanied with a great earthquake. Yet there is no mention made of this great trembling of the earth, either by *Sozomenus* or *Theodoret*, in their relation of the burning of Daphne; and it is added to keep the thunder company, and to do the more honour to the accident.

It would be very tedious to give a history of the duration of all the other Oracles after the birth of *Jesus Christ*. It is sufficient to note, at what time we find, that some of the principal Ones spoke their last. But it must always be remembered, that it is not understood, that this was the very last time they spoke, though it was the last occasion authors had to tell us that they spoke.

Dion, who did not finish his history till the eighth year of *Alexander Severus*, that is, in the 230th year of *Jesus Christ*, says, that in his time, *Amphilocus* still delivered Oracles in dreams: he tells us also, that there was in the city of *Apollonia* an Oracle, where things to come were foretold by observing the manner how the fire took hold of the incense that was cast upon the altar. But it was not permitted to ask this Oracle any questions concerning death or marriage. These unaccountable restrictions were sometimes founded upon the particular history of the god, who, in his lifetime, perhaps had reason to take an a-

version to some things: though I am also of opinion, that they might sometimes proceed from the ill success which those answers had, that were delivered by the Oracle concerning some particular matters.

* Under *Aurelian*, towards the year of *Christ* 272, the *Palmyrenians* being revolted, consulted the Oracle of *Apollo* of *Sarpedon* in *Cilicia*. They consulted likewise that of *Venus* of *Aphaca*; the form of which was singular enough to deserve the mentioning here. *Aphaca* is a place between *Heliopolis* and *Biblus*. Near the temple of *Venus* is a lake like a cistern: where, at certain assemblies had at set times, is seen a fire in the form of a globe, or of lamps: ‘And this fire, says *Zozimus*, has been seen even in our days,’ that is to say, about the 400th Year of *Jesus Christ*. The consultants throw into the lake the present designed for the goddess, of what kind soever it was; if she received it, it sinks to the bottom; if she receives it not, it swims on the surface of the water, be it of silver, or gold. In the year before the ruin of the *Palmyrenians*, their presents sunk to the bottom; but the year following they all swam on the top.

* *Lucinius*, having a design to renew the war with *Constantine*, consulted the Oracle of *Apollo Didymæus*, and had for answer two verses of *Homer*, of which this is the sense: ‘Poor old
‘ man! It is not for thee to fight against young

L 2

* *Zozimus*.† *Sozom*.

‘men; thou hast not strength enough, for old age pulls thee down.’

* A God, of no note, named *Besa*, delivered Oracles in answer to letters, at Abydos, a town on the confines of Thebais, under the empire of *Constantius*. For there were sent to this emperor certain letters, which had been left in the temple of *Besa*; upon which, he commenced a very rigorous prosecution, imprisoned or banished a great number of persons, and some he caused to be cruelly tormented: for, by these letters, the god was consulted as to the fate of the empire, or the duration of the reign of *Constantius*, or as to the success of some design on foot against him.

In fine, *Macrobius*, who lived under *Arcadius* and *Honorius*, sons of *Theodosius*, speaks of the god of Heliopolis in Syria; and of his Oracle, and of the lots of Antium, in terms which positively prove, that they were all remaining in his time.

But here we must observe, that it is of no consequence to our design, that all these histories should be true, or that these Oracles did really deliver the answers which are attributed to them; for false answers could only be ascribed to the Oracles that were known to be still subsisting; and the stories, which so many authors have related of them, prove, at least, that they did not believe they were ceased.

* *Amnian. Marcellinus.*

C H A P. IV.

That the Oracles in general ceased with Paganism.

ORACLES in general ceased only with Paganism, which was not immediately at the coming of *Jesus Christ*. For *Constantine* demolished but a few temples; and he was fain to make the crimes that were there committed his plea for it.

On this pretext, he pulled down the temple of * *Venus Aphacitis*, and that of † *Æsculapius* at *Ægæa* in *Cilicia*, in both of which there were Oracles. But yet he § prohibited sacrifices to the Heathen gods, and by that edict began to make their temples of no use.

The edicts of *Constantius*, and of *Julian* (then emperor) are extant, whereby all kinds of divination were prohibited on point of death, not only that of the astrologers, interpreters of dreams, and magicians, but also that of the Augurs and Soothsayers; which gave a great shock to the religion of the Romans. And indeed the emperors had a particular interest in prohibiting all kinds of divination, because one or other was always inquiring about their destiny, and especially who were to be their successors: and such successor

L 3

* *Zozimus*,

† *Eusebius*.

§ *Theodoret*.

trusting to the flattery of the diviner, used to revolt, and set up a claim to the empire.

As there were many Oracles remaining while *Julian* was emperor, so he applied himself, as much as he could, to the restoration of those that had been demolished; that for instance, in the suburbs of Daphne, which had been destroyed by *Adrian*, * who while he was but a private man, having dipt a leaf in the Castalian spring, (for there was one of this name at Daphne, as well as at Delphos,) found, when he took it out of the water, a narrative of what was to befall him, and advice to think of obtaining the empire. And therefore, when he was afterwards made emperor, for fear the same Oracle should give the like counsel to some body else, he caused the sacred spring to be choaked up, by throwing a great quantity of stones into it. There was monstrous ingratitude in this procedure; but *Julian* † caused the spring to be opened again, the dead bodies, which were buried near it, to be removed, and purified the place in the same manner as the Athenians had heretofore purged the Island of Delos.

Nay, *Julian* went farther, and would needs be himself the prophet of the Didymæan Oracle; for this he thought would be a means of retrieving the credit of prophecy, which then lay under much contempt. As he was emperor, he was (Pontifex Maximus, or) Chief Priest; and though

* *Sozomen.*

† *Ammianus Marcellinus.*

the emperors had not been accustomed to make any great use of this sacerdotal dignity, yet he thought it a much more serious affair : and therefore we see in one of his letters, that in the quality of Pontifex Maximus, he suspends a Pagan priest for three months from any sacerdotal function. The letter he wrote to *Arfoces*, Pontiff of Galatia, acquaints us with the method he took to make Paganism flourish again : he congratulates himself in the first place, that his zeal had produced such great effects in so short a time ; and then he declares his judgment to be, that the best expedient for the re-establishment of Heathenism would be, to transplant the virtues of Christianity into it, such as charity towards strangers, the decent interment of the dead, and that sanctity of life which the Christians, he says, so well counterfeit. He therefore recommends it to that *Pontiff* to oblige the Priests of Galatia, either by arguments or threats, to live regularly, to abstain from the public shews, and tipling houses ; to quit all mean, or infamous employments, to addict themselves, with all their family, only to the service of the gods, and to have a watchful eye upon the Galileans, in order to suppress their impieties and profanations. He observes, that it is a great shame, that whilst the Jews and Galileans maintained not only their own poor, but those of the Heathens too, the Pagans should let their poor starve, and not remember, that hospitality and liberality are virtues so peculiar and proper to them, that *Homer* brings

in *Eumæus* speaking thus: 'My guest, if a man of a degree much inferior to thine had come hither, I could not refuse to have entertained him; for all men both strangers and poor come as if sent from *Jupiter*; and the little I have to give, I give with pleasure.' Last of all, he sets down what distributions he appoints to be made yearly to the poor of *Galatia*, and he bids the Pontiff take care, that there be Hospitals built in every town for the reception of other men as well as Pagans. He thinks it beneath the dignity of the Pontiff to make frequent visits to the governors at their houses, and that he should only write to them; nor will he have the priests go to meet them, when they enter any town, but only when they come to the temples; and that there they go to receive them no farther than the porch. He also forbids the governors on such an occasion to have guards marching before them, because they are then no more than private persons; but he gives the soldiers leave to follow them, if they will.

With this care, and this imitation of christianity, it is probable, that if *Julian* had lived, he would have retarded the ruin of his religion; but God cut him off before he had reigned two years. *Jovian*, who succeeded him, set out zealously for the destruction of Paganism; but in the seven months of his reign, he could make no great progress.

Valens, who had the Eastern Empire, gave liberty to all men to worship what gods they pleas-

ed, and was himself more inclined to support Arianism than Christianity. * So that during his reign sacrifices were publicly made, and men as publicly eat the flesh of the victims. They, who were initiated into the Bacchanalian mysteries, celebrated them without fear; they ran up and down with their bucklers, tore dogs in pieces, and committed all the extravagances which that devotion required.

Valentinian, his brother, who had the Western Empire, was more zealous for the honour of Christianity; yet his conduct was not so steady as it should have been. He had made a law to forbid all nocturnal ceremonies; whereupon *Praetextatus*, the proconsul of Greece, represented to him, that the depriving the Greeks of those ceremonies, of which they were so fond, rendered their lives quite uneasy. *Valentinian* was moved with this, and consented, that notwithstanding his law, they might keep to the old customs. It is true, that we have this account from *Zosimus*, a Pagan historian, and some may say, that he invented it to induce a belief that the Pagans were still in some credit with the emperors; but it may be answered, that *Zosimus*, considering the then state of his religion, was more likely to have been in a humour of complaining of mischief that was not done to it, than to please himself with the thoughts of a favour that was not shewn to it.

This is certain however, that there are inscrip-

* *Theod.* lib. 5.

tions at Rome, and in other cities of Italy, by which it is manifest, that under the reign of *Valentinian*, persons of great note celebrated the sacrifices called *Taurobolia* and *Criobolia*, that is to say, 'The sprinkling of Bulls blood, or Rams blood.' Nay, by the great number of those inscriptions, one would be apt to think, that this ceremony was most in fashion during the time of this *Valentinian*, and the two other emperors of the same name.

As it is one of the oddest and most singular of all the Heathen rites, I fancy, that a description of it will not be unacceptable. *Prudentius*, who perhaps had seen it, gives it to us at length.

There was a deep pit dug, into which the person, for whom the ceremony was to be performed, descended with a sacred bandage about his head, a crown upon it, and in fine, with an equipage quite mysterious. Over the pit was placed a cover of wood, pierced through with a great many holes: to this cover they brought a Bull, crowned with a garland of flowers, and little plates of gold hanging upon his horns and forehead. Then his throat was cut with a consecrated knife, and his blood ran through the holes that were in the cover into the pit, which the person that stood there received with much devotion, catching it on his forehead, his cheeks, his arms, his shoulders, and all the parts of his body, and took what care he could that not one drop should fall beside him. At last out he came, a frightful spectacle, all dawbed with blood;

which still trickled down from his hair, beard, and clothes; but his comfort was, that now he was purified from all his crimes and regenerated to all eternity: for, it appears positively by the inscriptions, this sacrifice was, to those who celebrated it, a mystical and eternal regeneration.

But unless it were renewed once in twenty years, it would lose its power of everlasting duration. Women, as well as men, received this regeneration; they made all partakers of it who desired it; and what is most remarkable of all, whole cities received it by deputation. This sacrifice was now and then performed for the emperors health: and the provinces made their court to them, by sending some person in their name to besmear himself with the Bull's blood, for the obtaining of a long and happy life for the emperors. All this is clear from the inscriptions.

But now we come to the total ruin of Paganism under *Theodosius* and his sons.

Theodosius began first in Egypt, where he caused all the Temples to be shut up, and demolished that of *Serapis*, the most famous of them all.

As *Strabo* informs us, there was nothing finer in the whole Pagan religion than the pilgrimages which were made to *Serapis*. 'When the time, says he, of certain festivals was near at hand, such a multitude of people come down the canal from Alexandria to Canopus, where this temple stands, as is incredible. Day and night there is nothing to be seen, but boats full of men and women, singing and dancing with

‘all the freedom imaginable. At Canopus there
‘is a vast number of Inns on the banks of the
‘canal, for the refreshment of those travellers,
‘and for accommodating them in their diversifi-
‘cations.’ And therefore the sophist *Eunapius*, who
was a Pagan, seems to have had a mighty concern
for the temple of *Serapis*, and with gall enough
he describes its unhappy end. Men, says he,
that had never heard the noise of war, were
mighty valiant against the stones of this temple,
but especially against the rich offerings, which it
was full of: and in those holy places, says he,
they put infamous and useless monks, who, be-
cause they wore a black and slovenly habit, arro-
gated to themselves a tyrannical authority over
the minds of the people; and instead of those
gods which the light of our natural reasons dis-
covers to us, they set up, for objects of our ado-
ration, the heads of malefactors executed for their
crimes, and pickled to preserve them from cor-
ruption. Thus does this impious wretch treat
monks and relics. Surely the licentiousness of
those times was very great, when such invectives
were written against the religion of the emperors.
Ruffinus informs us, that the temple of *Serapis*
was found to be full of secret passages, and ma-
chines contrived for the impostures of the priests.
He tells us, amongst other things, that on the
east side of the temple, there was a little window,
through which, at a certain time of the day, a
ray of the sun fell just upon the mouth of *Serapis*:
at the same time, an image of the sun made of
iron

iron was brought in, which, being attracted by a loadstone fixed in the cieling, ascended up to the image of *Serapis*. Then they cried out, that the sun saluted their god: nay, when the iron image fell back, and the sun-beam went off from *Serapis's* mouth, they said, that the sun had paid his due compliment to him, and was retired about his own affairs.

After *Theodosius* had defeated the rebel *Eugenius*, he went to Rome, where the whole senate still adhered to Paganism. Their chief reason was, because, for twelve hundred years, Rome had been on good terms with its gods, and received all kind of favours from them. The emperor made a speech to the senate, exhorting them to embrace the Christian religion; but they replied, that by custom and experience, they had found Paganism to be a good religion: and if they should change it for that of the Christians, they knew not what might be the event. This was then the theology of the Roman Senate. When *Theodosius* saw them so stiff, he told them, that the public treasury was too much incumbered with the expences necessary for the sacrifices, and that he wanted the money to pay his armies. They replied, that their sacrifices would not be valid, unless they were made at the charge of the public. But that inconvenience was no argument with him: consequently the sacrifices and old ceremonies ceased. And *Zozimus* does not fail to observe, that from that time forwards

misfortunes of all sorts happened to the Roman Empire.

The same author tells us, that when *Theodosius* made that voyage to Rome, *Serena*, the wife of *Stilicon*, entered into the temple of the mother of the gods, to insult her, and that she made bold to convert a fine neck-lace, which the goddess wore, to her own use: an old Vestal virgin reproved her very sharply for this impiety, and followed her out of the temple, with a thousand curses. After which, says *Zozimus*, poor *Serena* was often frightened (both sleeping and waking) with a certain vision, that threatened her with death.

The last efforts of Paganism were those made by *Symmachus*, to obtain of the emperors *Valentinian*, *Theodosius*, and *Arcadius*, the re-establishment of the privileges of the Vestals, and of the altar of Victory in the capitol; but every body knows with what vigour St. *Ambrose* opposed it. Yet it appears, by the very process of that dispute, that Rome still retained a very strong tincture of Paganism. For St. *Ambrose* asks *Symmachus*, why the Pagans are not contented with having the public squares, porticoes and baths filled with their idols, and if nothing will serve them unless their altar of Victory be set up in the capitol, the very place of the whole city to which most Christians resort; ‘that the
‘ Christians, in that case (says he) must,
‘ whether they will or no, have the smoak of the
‘ sacrifices blown in their eyes, the noise of the

‘ music in their ears, the ashes in their throats,
‘ and the incense in their noses.’

Nay, even when Rome was besieged by *Alaric*, in the reign of *Honorius*, it was still full of idols. *Zozimus* complains, that all things conspiring then to the ruin of that unhappy city, the gods were not only disrobed, but even some of those that were of gold or silver melted down; of which number was Valour or Fortitude, which from that time forward wholly abandoned the Romans. This pretty conceit, *Zozimus* did not doubt, would pass for the true cause of the taking of Rome.

I am in some suspense, whether, upon the credit of this author, we may admit the following story to be true. *Honorius* forbade all persons that were not of the Christian religion to appear at court with a shoulder-belt, or to have any military command. *Generidus*, a Pagan, and a Barbarian too, but a man of great courage, who commanded the troops that lay in Dalmatia and Pannonia, came no more into the emperor’s presence, threw off his shoulder-belt, and did duty no longer. *Honorius* asked him one day, why he came not to court in his turn, as it was his duty? He replied, that there was a law made, that deprived him both of his belt and his command. The emperor told him, that law was not for such men as he was; but *Generidus* answered, that he could not admit of any distinction that separated him from all those who professed the same worship with himself. In short, he would not act again,

till the emperor himself, compelled by necessity, repealed his law. If this story be true, then we may judge, that *Honorius* contributed very little to the ruin of the Pagan religion.

But at last, all exercise of the Pagan religion was prohibited, on pain of death, by a constitution of the emperors *Valentinian* the third, and *Martian*, *An. Christ.* 451. and this was the last blow given to that false religion. And yet we find, that those very emperors, who were so zealous for the advancement of christianity, did, for all that, retain some relics of Paganism, and such too as were not inconsiderable. As for example, they still took upon them the title of sovereign Pontiffs; which was as much as to say, sovereign Pontiffs of the augurs, the soothsayers, in short, of all the colleges of Pagan priests, and the heads of all the antient Romish idolatry.

Zozimus pretends, that even *Constantine* the great, *Valentinian*, and *Valens*, willingly accepted from the Pagan priests both the title and habit of that dignity, which, according to custom, was presented to them at their accession to the empire; but that *Gratian* refused the pontifical equipage; which being related to the priests, the principal amongst them replied in a great heat: *Si princeps non vult appellari Pontifex, admodum brevi Pontifex Maximus fiet.* The point of this saying lies wholly in the Latin words, and it was grounded on the then revolt of *Maximus* against *Gratian*, with a design to strip him of the empire.

But the inscriptions still remaining are a more unexceptionable testimony of this matter, than that of *Zozimus*. There we see the title of *Pontifex Maximus*, or sovereign Pontiff, given to the Christian emperors; and even in the sixth century, two hundred years after Christianity had ascended the imperial throne. The * emperor *Justin*, amongst his other titles, assumes that of *Pontifex Maximus*, in an inscription which he had caused to be made for the city of Justinopolis in Istria, to which he gave his name.

To be one of the gods of a false religion is surely much worse than to be the *Pontifex Maximus* of it. Now the Heathens deified the Roman emperors: and why not? They had made the city of Rome a goddess. The emperors *Theodosius* and *Arcadius*, though they were Christians, permitted *Symmachus*, that great champion for the Pagan religion, to give them the title of (*Vestra Divinitas*, or) *Your Divinity*: which he could only express in the sense, and according to the custom of the Pagans. And in some inscriptions, in honour of *Arcadius* and *Honorius*, are these words, *Devotus numini, majestatique eorum*, i. e. 'Devoted to their divinity, and majesty.'

Nay, the Christian emperors not only received those titles from others, but gave them to themselves: as appears by the constitutions (or laws) of *Theodosius*, *Valentinian*, *Honorius*, and *Anastasia*.

M 3

* *Grutarius*,

sius; wherein they sometimes call their edicts heavenly statutes, and divine Oracles: and sometimes they say expressly, 'The most happy decree of our divinity,' etc.

It may be said, that this was nothing but the then stile of the court of chancery; but it was certainly a bad stile, ridiculous under the Heathen religion itself, and blasphemous under the Christian. And therefore is it not very wonderful, that such extravagant rant should become so familiar and common in speech, that they could not forbear it!

The truth is, that flattery, which subjects are so apt to bestow upon their sovereigns, and the natural fondness which princes have for praise, kept up the use of these expressions too long. I confess that this flattery, and this fondness, are each of them very extraordinary in its kind: and they are both unlimited. That a man should be in earnest when he gives another man the title of a god, is hard to conceive; but that this man should accept the title, and that with so much fondness as to accustom him to the giving of it to himself, and all this while have a right notion of what a god is; this is a thing that I know not how it can be reconciled with a salvo to the honour of the human nature.

There was nothing so tempting in the title of *Pontifex Maximus*, that could puff the vanity of the christian emperors to keep it up: but perhaps they thought that it would tend to prolong their

respect from the Pagans that remained. Or, it may be, they pleased themselves with the thought of being the heads of the Christian religion, under the ambiguity of that title; for upon certain occasions they were magisterial enough in their use of it: and some authors say, that the emperors renounced this stile, out of respect to the popes, who, probably, were apprehensive that they might make an ill use of it.

But it is not so surprizing to see these relics of Paganism transplanted for some time into the Christian religion, as to find what was most barbarous, extravagant, and the most opposite to the common-sense and interest of mankind, to be the last that left the field of all the Pagan superstitions; I mean; human sacrifices. It was a strange whimsical religion; for it consisted of some things extremely frolicksom, and others very tragical. In one place, the ladies went to the temples in a fit of devotion, to offer their favours to the first comer: and in another place, the same devotion caused the throats of men to be cut upon an altar. These detestable sacrifices were made in all nations: the Grecians performed them, as well as the Scythians, though not so often; and the Romans, though they had obliged the Carthaginians, in a treaty of peace concluded between them, to sacrifice their children no longer to *Saturn*, according to the custom derived from their ancestors, the Phaenicians, yet the Romans themselves every year sacrificed a man to *Jupiter Latiæ*. *Eusebius* quotes *Porphyrius* for this, as a

thing still practised in his days. *Lactantius* and *Prudentius*, the one in the beginning, and the other at the end of the fourth age, are evidences of the same thing, each of them for his own time. These ceremonies, that were so full of horror, lasted as long as the Oracles, which discovered nothing but folly and credulity.

C H A P. V.

That if Paganism had not been abolished, yet the Oracles would have ceased. The first particular reason of their decay.

THE Oracles could not but be involved in the ruin of Paganism, when it was abolished by Christianity. It is moreover certain that Christianity, even before it was the prevailing religion, did great mischief to the Oracles; for the Christians made it their study to disabuse mankind, by a discovery of their impostures. But, independently of the Christian religion, the Oracles for other reasons declined, and at last must have quite failed.

It was observed that they began to degenerate from the very time when they left off giving their answers in verse. *Plutarch* has written a tract expressly to inquire into the reason of this change, wherein, according to the manner of the Greek authors, he sets down all that could be said on this subject, either true or false.

First he says, that the god who inspires the Pythian priestess adapts himself to her capacity, and does not answer in verse by her, as she has not a natural genius for poetry. The knowledge of futurity belongs to *Apollo*; but the manner of expressing it to the priestess. It is not the fault of the musician, if he cannot play as well upon a harp as upon a flute, when he is obliged to accommodate himself to the instrument. If the Pythian Oracle delivered its answers in writing, should we deny that *Apollo* inspired them, because they were not written in a very fine hand? The soul of the Pythian, when uniting to *Apollo*, is like a young virgin going to be married, who as yet knows nothing, and has not the art of versification.

But why then did all the antient Pythian priestesses answer in verse? Were they not virgin souls united to *Apollo*? To this *Plutarch* replies: first, that those priestesses did now and then speak in prose; but that in the ancient times all people were born poets: so that as he tells us, they had no sooner drank a little freely, but they fell a rhyming; they had no sooner cast their eyes on a pretty woman, but they made verses without end; and they uttered sounds, which were naturally songs. Consequently, their feasts and their courtships were the most delightful things in the world. But now this poetic genius has deserted mankind: and though our amours are as ardent as those of our ancestors, and though we are as free in expression, yet love creeps in humble prose.

And even all the sect of *Socrates*, and the *Platonists*, who talked so much of love, knew not how to make verses. The whole of this has too much fancy, and too little truth in it, to deserve a serious answer.

Plutarch gives another reason, which has something more of probability, *viz.* that the ancients wrote always in verse, whether they treated of Religion, Morality, Natural Philosophy, or Astronomy. *Orpheus*, and *Hesiod*, who were well known to be poets, were philosophers also: and *Parmenides*, *Xenophanes*, *Empedocles*, *Eudoxus*, and *Thales*, whom all men own for philosophers, were also poets. It is very strange indeed that poetry should be elder brother to prose, and that men did not at first write in the most natural language! But it is highly probable, that since all their writings then were precepts, they were formed into metre, that they might be the more easily remembered: and therefore all their laws and their moral maxims were in verse. Taking this for granted, poetry had a much more serious original than is usually imagined, and the muses are quite deviated from their original gravity. Who would imagine that the Code should naturally have been written in metre, and *Fontaine's Tales* in prose? there was a necessity therefore, says *Plutarch*, that the ancient Oracles should be delivered in verses, since all matters of importance were so: *Apollo* too was in this willing to follow the mode of those times; and when prose

came to be in use, he was for being still in the fashion.

I am of opinion myself, that the Oracles at first gave answers in verse, both that they might be more easily remembered, and to comply with the custom which had condemned prose to be used only in common discourse. But history and philosophy began to shake off those useless chains towards the reign of *Cyrus*. For *Thales*, who lived at that time, was one of the last poetic philosophers; and *Apollo* only left off speaking in verse a little before *Pyrrhus's* days, as *Cicero* informs us, which was about two hundred and thirty years after *Cyrus*. It appears from hence that poetry being found suitable to the dignity of the Oracles, it was retained in use at Delphos, as long as it was possible; till at last they were reduced to humble prose.

Plutarch could hardly be in earnest, when he said, that the Oracles were pronounced in prose, because people required clearer answers, and would be no longer deluded with the mysterious bombast of verses. For whether it were the gods, or only the priests that spoke, I would fain know if it was possible to oblige either to speak more clearly.

But he has more probability on his side, when he pretends, that prophetic versification fell into contempt, by being in use amongst those pretended fortune-tellers, who strolled about the country, and were often consulted by the rabble in the cross-ways. Now the priests of the temples scorn-

ed to use any custom in common with them; for they were quacks of more dignity and importance; which in that profession makes a mighty difference.

But *Plutarch* reserves his true reason till last: which is, that in former times men went to Delphos to consult only about matters of the highest consequence; as Wars, building of cities, the interests of kings, and commonwealths; whereas now-a-days, says he, private persons go thither to ask the Oracle, if they shall marry? If they shall buy a slave? If they shall thrive by their traffic! And when cities send thither, it is only to inquire, whether their lands shall be fruitful, or their flocks increase? These questions deserve not the trouble of an answer in verse; and if the god should take that pains, he would be like those sophists, who make a parade of their learning, when there is no need for it.

But now I come to that which conduced most of all to the ruin of the Oracles. The Romans were become masters of all Greece, and of those kingdoms founded by *Alexander's* successors: and as soon as the Grecians had submitted to the Roman yoke, from which they had no hopes of being ever free, Greece was no longer agitated with the continual divisions which had harrassed all those petty states, whose interests were so mightily embroiled; for their common masters made them all quiet, and peace was the product of their slavery. I think, the Greeks had never happy days till then; for they lived in a profound
tran-

tranquility, and in perfect ease; they passed their time in their parks of exercise, in their theatres, and in their schools of philosophy. They had public sports, comedies, disputations, and harangues; and for men of their genius, what could be desired more? But all this afforded little business for the Oracles, and there was very seldom any necessity to importune the Delphian god. Therefore it was very natural for the priests not to give themselves the trouble any longer of answering in verse, when they found their trade not so gainful as it had been formerly.

As the Romans did the Oracles great prejudice by the peace which they established in Greece, so they did them much more by the slight they put upon them; for their taste did not lie that way; they were attached only to the books of the Sybils, and to the Tuscan Divinations, which were performed by the observations of the flights, singing, or feeding of birds. Now as the maxims and opinions of the governors easily pass to the governed, it is no wonder, that the Oracles, being a Greek invention, should follow the fate of Greece; and that as with her they flourished, so with her they decayed.

But for all this, we must acknowledge, that there were Oracles in Italy. *Tiberius*, as *Suetonius* says, went to the Oracle of Geryon, at Aponus, now Abano, near Padua; where was a certain spring, which if we will believe *Claudian*, restored speech to the dumb, and healed all sorts of diseases. *Suetonius* says further, that *Tiberius* had once a mind

to destroy the Oracles that were near Rome, but was diverted from it by the miracle of the Praenestine lots, which, when they were brought from Praeneste to Rome, in a box well locked and sealed, were not to be found in it; but when the same box was carried back to Praeneste, there they were.

To these lots of Praeneste, and to those of Antium, we must add the lots of the * Temple of *Hercules* which was at Tibur.

Pliny the younger thus describes the Oracle of *Clitumnus*, the god of a certain river in Umbria: 'The temple is ancient, and much revered: in it stands *Clitumnus*, in a Roman habit, and the lots manifest the presence, and power of the divinity. Round about him are several little chapels, in some of which there are fountains and springs: for *Clitumnus* is, as it were, the father of many other rivulets, which join him. There is a bridge which separates the sacred part of his waters from the prophane. Above this bridge, people are allowed only to pass in boats; but below it, they may bathe themselves.' I do not know of any other rivers that pronounced Oracles, for it was not their custom.

Nay, at Rome itself there were Oracles. Had not *Æsculapius* one in his temple, which stood in an island of the river *Tiber*? There has been found at Rome a piece of a marble table, wherein the stories of the three miracles of *Æsculapius* are engraven in Greek. The most considerable

* *Statius*.

of them is this that follows, translated *verbatim* from the inscription. ‘ At the same time, the Oracle made this answer to a blind man named *Caius*. He was advised to go to the sacred altar, there to kneel down and worship; then to go from the right side to the left, and lay his five fingers upon the altar, and afterwards clap his hand upon his eyes. When all this was done, the blind man was restored to his sight, of which the people were witnesses, and testified the joy which they received in seeing such great miracles wrought in the reign of our emperor *Antoninus*.’ The two other cures are not so surprizing; for one was only of a Pleurisy, and the other of a Bloody Flux; both of them desperate diseases indeed; but the god prescribed to his patients ‘ Pine-apples and honey, with wine and certain ashes;’ which are things that those men, who are hard of belief, will be apt to think are not sure remedies.

These inscriptions, for all that they are in Greek, were certainly formed at Rome; for the shape of the letters, and the orthography, do not at all seem to be by the hand of a Grecian sculptor. Besides, though it be true, that the Romans made their inscriptions generally in Latin, yet they formed some in Greek, especially when they had a particular reason for it. Now it is very probable, that no other language but the Greek was used in the temple of *Æsculapius*, because he was a Grecian god, and sent for to Rome from Greece, in that great plague, of which every one knows the history.

Thus we see that this Oracle of *Æsculapius* was not of Roman institution; and I believe, that if it were an inquiry worth the while, most of the Italian Oracles' would be found to be of Greek original.

Be this as it will, the smallness of the number of the Oracles in Italy, and even at Rome itself, is but a very inconsiderable exception to what we have advanced. *Æsculapius* dealt only in physic, and had no share in the government: and though he had a rare knack at making the blind to see, yet the senate would not have trusted him with the least affair of state. Private persons amongst the Romans might give what credit they would to the Oracles; but the state had no faith at all in them. The Sibyls, and the entrails of animals were its guides: and a vast number of Gods fell into contempt, when the people took notice, that the masters of the world did not vouchsafe to consult them.

CH A P. VI.

The second particular cause of the decay of the Oracles.

I MEET with a difficulty here, that I will not conceal. About the time of *Pyrrhus*, *Apollo* was reduced to prose, that is to say, the Oracles began then to grow into discredit, and yet the Romans were not masters of Greece 'till a long time

after *Pyrrhus*; and from the reign of *Pyrrhus* to the establishment of the empire of the Romans in Greece, there were as many wars and commotions in that country as ever, and by consequence as many important reasons for consulting the Oracle of Delphos.

This indeed is true; but we must also observe that about the time of *Alexander* the great, and a little before *Pyrrhus*'s days, certain great sects of Philosophers were formed in Greece, viz. Cynics, Peripatetics, and Epicureans, who made a jest of the Oracles. The Epicureans especially made themselves merry with the paltry poetry that came from Delphos, where the priests blundered out verses as well as they could, and often committed faults against the rules of metre. Now those satirical Philosophers were mightily disturbed, that '*Apollo*, the God of poetry,' should fall infinitely short of *Homer*, who was but a meer mortal, whom *Apollo* himself had inspired.

It was to little purpose to tell them, that the badness of the verses was an indication that they were made by a God, who had a noble contempt of rules, or the 'beauty of style. For this would not pass with the philosophers; who, to ridicule this answer, compared it to the story of a painter, who being engaged to draw the picture of a horse, rolling on his back on the ground, drew one running full speed: and when he was told, that this was not such a picture as was bespoke, he turned it upside down, and then asked, 'If the horse

‘ did not now tumble upon his back? Thus did these philosophers banter such persons, who, by a way of reasoning that destroyed itself, inferred, that the verses were made by a God, whether they were good or bad.

At length, the priests of Delphos, being quite run down by the banter of all those wits, were forced to renounce verses, at least as to what was pronounced on the Tripod; for there were other poets in the temple, who deliberately turned into verse, what the divine fury had inspired the Pythian priestesses with only in prose. Was it not ridiculous, that men could not be contented with the Oracle just as it came from the mouth of the God? But perhaps, such as had come a great way for it, were ashamed to carry home an Oracle in meer prose.

The Gods, being willing to keep up the use of verses as long as ever they could, did now and then condescend to steal some out of *Homer*; whose poetry was certainly better than their own. Of this there are examples enough; but, both the stolen verses, and the poets kept in pay in their temples, must be admitted as proofs that the old natural poetry of the Oracles was in very great disgrace.

Those great sects of philosophers, enemies to the Oracles, must needs have done them a more essential prejudice than the reducing them to prose. For no doubt they opened the eyes of many rational persons, and made the populace suspect the certainty of what they did not doubt before. It

was happy for the Oracles that philosophy did not appear in their infancy.

C H A P. VII.

The last particular causes of the decay of the Oracles.

THE cheats of the Oracles were so gross, that at last they were discovered by a thousand different accidents. I suppose that the Oracles were at first entertained with great fondness and joy, because nothing could be more convenient than to have Gods always ready at hand to answer every question that might be suggested by uneasiness, or curiosity: and I fancy that it was not without great reluctance, that people parted with this conveniency; and that the Oracles could never have come to an end with Paganism, if they had not been the most impertinent things in the world. But, at last, people, after so much experimental knowlege, could not help being undeceived.

The priests contributed to it not a little, by their most impudent abuse of their false ministry; for they thought they had brought matters to such a point, that there was no need for them to use any decorum.

I say nothing of the humorous answers sometimes delivered by these Oracles. For example, * To a man that came to ask of the deity, 'What he should do to be rich?' He answered, very pleasantly, 'That he need do no more than get all the land between Sicyone and Corinth.' And sometimes the consulter would make free with the Oracles. *Polemon*, sleeping in the temple of *Æsculapius*, to learn of him how he should be cured of the gout, the God appeared to him, and told him, 'That he must abstain from cold drink.' *Polemon* replied, 'What would you advise, my good friend, if you were to cure an ox?' But these were only the merry conceits of the priest, who would sometimes both give and take a joke.

It was still more remarkable, that the gods were sure to be enamoured with the fair ladies; for they were to stay whole nights in their temples, dressed for the purpose by their own husbands, and furnished with presents to requite the god for his pains. It is true, that the doors of the temple were shut up in the sight of the spectators; but the husbands were not let into the secret of the subterraneous passages.

For my part, I do not question but such intrigues were practised more than once. *Herodotus* writes, that in the eighth and uppermost story of that superb tower belonging to the temple of *Belus* in Babylon, there was a magnificent bed, where a woman, singled out by the god, lay eve-

* *Athenæus*.

ry night. The like was done at Thebes in Egypt: and when the priestess of the Oracle of Patara in Lycia was to prophesy, she must first take a night's lodging in the temple, whither *Apollo* came to *inspire her*.

All these things were practised during the darkest state of Paganism, and in times when the Pagan ceremonies were not liable to be contradicted; but in the view of the very christians themselves, *Saturn* of Alexandria had such women brought in the night to his temple, as he thought fit to name by the mouth of his priest *Tyrannus*. Many women had received this honour with great respect, and none made any complaints of *Saturn*, though he was the oldest, and the most uncomplaisant of all the gods. But at last there was one, who, having lain in the temple, considered with herself, that nothing had passed there, but what declared the performance to be quite HUMAN, and what *Tyrannus* was very capable of: whereupon she acquainted her husband of the thing, who commencing a suit against *Tyrannus*, the wretch confessed all: what a scandal was this to Alexandria!

Thus the wickedness of the priests, their insolence, the several accidents that had brought their cheats to light, the obscurity, uncertainty, and the falseness of their answers, would at last have destroyed the reputation of the Oracles, and proved their utter ruin, even if Paganism had not been come to a period. But other foreign reasons are added to it; such as first, the jests made of the Oracles by the

great sects of the Grecian philosophers; then the total neglect of them by the Romans; and last of all, the utter detestation of them by the christians, who abetted them together with Paganism.



THE END.